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An inquiry concerning
religion



AN

INQUIRY CONCERNING RELIGION.

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BY
✓
GEORGE LONG,

AUTHOR OF 'AN ESSAY ON THE MORAL NATURE OF MAN,'
'THE CONDUCT OF LIFE,' &c.

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."—1 Thessalonians, v. 21.

LONDON:
LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN AND LONGMANS.

1855.

PRINTED BY TAYLOR AND FRANCIS,
RED LION COURT, FLEET STREET.

PREFACE.

THE following pages contain the result of reading and reflection on subjects of unrivalled importance, commenced at an early age, and continued through a long life.

The work is divided into four parts. The first relates to the Being and Attributes of God; the subject of the second is Natural Religion. Both are short, and they may be properly considered introductory to the third and fourth parts, which form by far the larger portion of the work.

The third part is an inquiry into the Evidences of the Truth of the Christian Religion, both internal and historical. The question whether it be incredible that the Deity should have revealed his will to man is discussed; and an investigation follows of the proofs which may reasonably be expected of the truth of a revelation. These are drawn from its nature and character, which is usually called Internal Evidence,

and from the facts which occurred on its first promulgation, and during its early progress. Under this last head the question arises, whether human testimony can afford satisfactory proof of a miracle. The history of Jesus Christ is traced through the four Gospels; and an inquiry is pursued into what he required of his disciples in faith and practice to entitle them to enjoy the blessings of his religion. Then follows an examination of the history of the preaching of the gospel by the apostles, contained in the book of Acts, in which the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is fully investigated, and facts are produced from the Roman history in proof of the truth of Christianity. The last portion of the third part relates to the Epistles and the Revelation, and the evidence they afford of the early state and condition of the Christian church is examined.

The subjects of the fourth part are, the Progress, Present State, and Future Prospects of Christianity. A sketch is given of the early history of the Christians, of their persecutions by the Jews and the Romans, till their religion was established by Constantine; the divisions among Christians, and the persecutions of the dominant party; the rapid advance of Popery, the assumption of unlimited power by the Roman Pontiff, the Reformation, and its effects in the Christian world. In considering the present state and future prospects of Christianity, the subject of

Church Establishments is discussed. The work concludes with an examination of what appear to have been the principal causes which have prevented the Christian Religion from having the full effect which its character and doctrines might have been expected to produce on human conduct and human happiness.

The right and the duty of Free Inquiry are asserted throughout. A very full Table of Contents is prefixed to the first part.

The object of the work being to discover the truth in its infinitely important subjects, the strictest impartiality has been aimed at in the statement of every argument. In what degree it has been attained the serious and candid reader must judge for himself.

33 Queen Anne Street,
October 25, 1855.

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E R R A T A.

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- „ 128 „ 14, *for* set *read* sat.
- „ 225 „ 10 from the bottom, *for* same *read* sacred.
- „ 229 „ 7 from the bottom, *for* council *read* counsel.
- „ 233 „ 19 *for* a *read* an.
- „ 244 „ 9 from the bottom, *after* then *read* would.
- „ 278 „ 19, *for* used *read* done.
- „ 321 note * line 3, *for* 1803 *read* vol. iii.

AN
INQUIRY CONCERNING RELIGION.

PART I.

THE BEING AND ATTRIBUTES OF GOD.

THE most important inquiries in which the human mind can be engaged are those which relate to the Author of our being, to the relation in which we stand to him, and to the hope which we may entertain of his favour here and hereafter. Is there indeed a God? Is he my Creator? Am I dependent on him for all I enjoy? Is my future existence for weal or for woe in his hands? These are questions, which nothing but absolute stupidity, or the most reckless unconcern on the most important of all subjects, can prevent a thinking being from asking himself.

“Do you believe in the existence of a God?”
There are, I hope and believe, very few who will hesitate to answer this question in the affirmative;

but it is certain that these words may be used in very different senses by different individuals. Among the ancient heathens, even the most cultivated and refined of them, the Greeks and Romans, the notion of a Deity was only that of a being possessed of power superior to that of man. Jupiter himself, though called the Father of gods and man, was said to be the son of Saturn, whom he dethroned, as the former had previously dethroned his own father. Fate or Chaos is referred to as the origin of the gods, and existence from eternity was not ascribed to any of them. Fine theistical sentiments may be met with here and there in the writings of the ancient philosophers, but I do not find that the exalted ideas now entertained of the Deity are to be found distinctly indicated and enforced in any of them. I shall endeavour to show shortly that the eternity and the unity of the Creator may be satisfactorily proved by the works of his hands; but it is only since the promulgation of the Christian religion that men have been led to the proper mode of considering this subject, and it may well be doubted whether, without revelation, the human mind would ever have attained the sound and rational theistical views which now prevail among the most intelligent individuals in all Christian countries.

It will perhaps be the best course, in treating of the most important subject of the existence of God, to state what appear to be the conceptions of the Deity usually entertained by intelligent persons. All, I think, now agree in believing God to be a self-existent uncaused being who has enjoyed independent existence from all eternity. To the modern theist such beings as Jupiter, Apollo and Minerva would not

be considered gods ; but would rather be classed with angels or demons, beings to whom powers are ascribed beyond those of man, but who are not held to possess the independent and uncontrolled power which we attribute to God.

Another of our conceptions of Deity in which all are agreed, is that he is possessed of original undervived power. In all ages and countries indeed, and in all states of mind, from the lowest and most uncultivated to the highest and most improved, power has always been attributed to the gods ; but it was held by the heathen to be limited and controlled by fate.

Self-existence and power, however, are not the only elements which form our conception of the Deity ; and he is always held to be intelligent as well as self-existent and powerful. There is nothing to distinguish a being without intelligence, although self-existent and possessed of uncontrollable power, from what is usually called fate or destiny. Could we suppose such a being to exist, we could feel no love or reverence for *him* or *it*, whichever it ought to be called, nor fear of any other kind than that which we have of thunder, floods, or earthquakes. We might indeed have extreme dread of such a power, but that feeling could not be enhanced in the smallest degree by any reference to our own character and conduct. Such a being could give no laws for the regulation of our lives, and therefore we could have no hope of reward for obedience, or fear of punishment for disobedience. Intelligence then must be held to belong to God, and the notion of fate as controlling the Deity is no longer a doctrine of any theist.

In entering on an inquiry into the foundation of

our belief in the existence of God, it will be proper to begin with the assertion that something must have existed from all eternity. The existence of any thing clearly proves this. It has been well said, that "when we place ourselves in an imaginary point of time, and then try to conceive how a world, finite or infinite, should begin to exist, absolutely without cause, we find an instantaneous and irresistible check put to the conception, and we are compelled at once to reject the supposition, so that the manner in which we reject it is a proper authority for doing so. It is superfluous, in this case, to inquire into the nature of the check and rejection, and dissent grounded thereon, since after all our inquiries we must still find an insuperable reluctance to assent. The supposition will not remain in the mind, but is thrown out immediately ; and I do not speak of this as what ought to follow from a proper theory of evidence and assent, but as a fact, which every man feels, whatever his notions of logic be, or whether he has any or no ; and I appeal to every man for the truth of this fact. Now, no truth can have a greater reality to us, nor any falsehood a greater evidence against it, than this instantaneous necessary assent or dissent*." I need add nothing to this ; and perhaps it requires an apology to have mentioned so absurd a supposition as that the universe should have come into existence when absolutely nothing had existed before, a notion not, so far as I am aware, to be met with in the wildest freaks of insanity.

Our next inquiry will be whether we have sufficient evidence to induce or rather to compel us to believe

* Hartley on Man, the beginning of the 2nd volume.

that some intelligent being must have existed from eternity ; in other words, to believe in the existence of an underived self-existent first cause, that is, in God. Now, the existence of any degree of intelligence in the universe clearly establishes this dogma. Let us look into our own minds and ask ourselves if we can possibly believe or conceive that there was a period when no intelligent being whatever existed ; and that at some point of time intelligence began for the first time to exist. There seem to be only two possible ways of putting this supposition : either intelligence began when there had been absolutely no existence at all before, or masses of matter which had been previously unintelligent at some period acquired intelligence by means of some particular form into which they had been brought by the motions of their particles. The first case has been already negatived. We will now proceed to the second.

The supposition that intelligence is the result of matter and motion embraces the theory of the ancient religionists, that the gods were produced from Chaos ; and also the philosophy of Epicurus, which derives the whole universe, animate and inanimate, intelligent and unintelligent, from a fortuitous concourse of atoms. But this supposition is as unintelligible and inconceivable as the other. We are entirely at a loss to conceive that any modification whatever of matter and motion can produce thought. Our experience affords no ground for such a supposition. We know indeed that the phænomena of thought are connected with the state of the brain, and that thought may be injured and even destroyed by derangements of the brain, but these facts throw no light on the question

how it is that we first became thinking beings. Our existence, both bodily and mental, we must ascribe to some pre-existing cause, unless we suppose ourselves to have existed from all eternity. If we could be satisfied that the particles of matter of which our bodies are composed have had an eternal existence, and taken varied forms from time to time, we have no evidence of the pre-existence of our minds. It is nothing to the purpose to say that they *may* have existed previously to our coming into this world, although we have no recollection of any such state of being. This is but an arbitrary assumption; and not the slightest evidence, or anything deserving the name of an argument can be produced in its favour. The mind of an infant evidently appears to be in a primary, rudimental state, endued with sensation, and with no other indication of intelligence than a mere perception of external objects. There is absolutely nothing from which to infer that an infant is in any other than the first stage of his existence. We have then a new being in the world possessed of sensation and perception. To what are these qualities to be ascribed? If we say that they are the result of matter and motion, let us consider to what this assumption will lead. If matter and motion can produce sensation and intelligence in any case, there is no possibility of setting bounds to the degree of sensation and intelligence which may be their result. If any, then, so far as we know, all, even the highest intelligence, may have been produced by matter and motion. But if this be so, there may have been a period when nothing but matter existed, and all the intelligence in the universe may have been produced by the motion and

form of matter. Now, does or can any rational mind believe this? In all the most elaborate contrivances of the inventive genius of man, with whatever powerful working of the intellect conceived, and however skilfully executed, not the slightest degree of intelligence has been given to the instrument formed. We perceive no other connexion in ourselves between the powers of the mind and the body than that they are indissolubly united (at least as far as our existence in this world is concerned), and that the body furnishes the means by which the mind becomes acquainted with external things. When an infant comes into the world, we perceive the rudiments of his bodily and of his mental powers, but the one is essentially different from the other. It has been said by some that we know nothing of mind; but it may be truly asserted that we know more of mind than of matter. That which I call myself is mind; and of matter I know and can know nothing but what is derived from impressions made on the mind by external objects. The loss of a leg or an eye, or any other part of the body, does not interfere with a man's personal identity. Parts of the brain, and I believe each particular portion of it, may be destroyed without extinguishing the mental faculties. If indeed the whole brain be destroyed, intelligence ceases. At the hour of death sensation and intelligence vanish together, and the body remains an inert and insensible mass. Beyond this we know not what death really is. There are three possible suppositions: the mind may be deprived by death of all its powers, and may remain inactive and unconscious as in sleep till it is again united with a material organization at the resurrec-

tion ; or it may continue to exist in a state of consciousness when severed from the body, or it may cease to exist altogether. I do not perceive, from anything we know of the powers of the human mind, that we can positively deny that any one of these suppositions may be true, but the believer in the truth of revealed religion will adopt either the first or the second. Even supposing the third supposition should be admitted, it could only prove that the mind cannot exercise its faculties except when combined with a material organization ; but not that it results from it. It gives no proof of the identity of matter and motion with thought, which, according to our conception, is of a totally different character ; and which is never, in the slightest degree, produced by the most skilful exertion of mechanical genius. When a man ceases to breathe he dies. The motions of the lungs, of the heart, and of the blood along the veins and the arteries have ceased ; but not a particle of matter has been taken away from the body. The organized frame remains as before ; but sensation and mental percipiency are withdrawn. Is there any sound argument to show us, is there any analogy to lead us to believe, that all or any of the powers of the human mind have their origin in the movement of the particles of matter of which the body is composed ? Can we believe that the profound mathematical investigations and the wonderful discoveries of Newton, and that the almost miraculous creations of Shakspeare's mighty genius were merely the result of the mechanical action of a material substance ? What is there in motion which has any tendency to produce such marvellous effects ? To a vast majority of those whose

minds have been engaged in the inquiry, it has appeared clear that the mind is of a nature quite distinct from material substance, though united in a way incomprehensible to us with a material organization, which is the medium of its communication with the outer world. If then we find no sufficient reason to assent to the notion that our own mental faculties are derived from mere matter and motion, we have certainly no ground to admit that any other intelligence can have had such an origin; and we are necessarily led to the conclusion, that as intelligence does now exist, it must have existed from all eternity. But as we have no rational ground to believe that our own minds had any existence till a short time before we were born, and as we have seen that we cannot admit that they have derived their existence from matter and motion, nothing remains to explain the phenomena but that they have been called into existence by some superior intelligence. If we could prove that the intelligence thus possessed of creative power had itself originated in time, it would be necessary to admit a cause of that intelligence; and, by however many removes, we must at last arrive at an intelligent Being who has existed from eternity.

But it may here be asked what we know of creation, and what conception can we form of one intelligent being having been called into existence by the volition of a superior intelligence? In answer to the first question, it is enough to say that our present inquiry is not concerning what we know, but about what we have rational ground for believing. In answering the second question, we must call our attention to what it is most important that we should constantly bear in

mind—the limited nature of our own faculties. We feel, and we must feel, that the creation of either material or intellectual things or beings is far beyond our comprehension. We know nothing but facts. We perceive intelligent beings and material things around us, and are able to carry our researches into their natures and qualities to an amazing extent; and we have built up, by investigations and considerations of these facts, a vast body of science; but when we ask ourselves how these things began to exist, we are inevitably led to a power or powers far superior to ourselves; and we perceive indications of power, knowledge, and wisdom far beyond what the wisest of the human race could ever pretend to possess. These matters will be shortly considered in detail. For the present it may suffice to say that the existence of creative power in some being superior to man will account satisfactorily for the phænomena in question; and that there is nothing in our experience to lead us to deny its existence. When we direct our attention to the universe around us, and find that the moon pursues its monthly course around the earth; that the planets, with the globe which we inhabit, revolve around the great centre of light and heat; that all their motions are carried on with unvarying regularity; and that the principles which regulate their movements are common to all these vast bodies, and to the fixed stars at immeasurable distance from the solar system to which we belong; when we find that these motions are such that the course of one planet does not interfere with those of the others, and that though alterations do take place continually from the action

of one planet on another, yet that none of these perturbations tend to the destruction of the system or of any one of its parts, but that, for any thing we know to the contrary, the whole system of material things is fitted to endure for eternity; when, leaving these large views of the material world, we carry our attention to the structure of the organized bodies, animal and vegetable, with which we are acquainted, and find throughout, wherever our attention is directed, that the organization of all is fitted for the preservation and well-being of the plant or animal, and adapted to the place which it is to occupy, and to the uses and objects to which it is to be applied,—these observations necessarily lead us to perceive that the material universe displays a wisdom in design and a power in execution to which we can assign no bounds and which appear to act wholly uninfluenced by any hostile and antagonistic power.

From the material world let us now turn our attention to the world of mind; and here it may suffice to consider ourselves. Well did our mighty dramatic poet say, in the language of his most philosophical character, “What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god!” Yet let us look to the most exalted in intellect of the human species,—to the profound philosopher who has sounded the depths of science, and extended its domain by his discoveries; to the inventive genius who has applied the forces of nature in new forms for the use and benefit of mankind; to the great poet who from the stores of his imagination has brought forth

characters, ideas and sentiments fitted alike for the delight and the improvement of his species ; or to the wise and patriotic statesman whose sage measures have advanced the prosperity of his country, improved her resources, and raised her to a higher place among the nations ; and let us then call to mind, taking the case of any one of these individuals, that he was once a poor weak and apparently insignificant infant, quite helpless, dependent for his nourishment and for the continuance of his existence on those around him, and exhibiting nothing of an intellectual character beyond the bare perception of external objects. Now, how is it that the infant has grown to be a philosopher, a man of inventive mechanical genius, a poet, or a statesman, but by the development of those intellectual powers of which we discover such slight indications in the infant ; and does not the wonderful development of those powers indicate beyond the possibility of doubt the existence of a pre-existing cause ? That cause must have been intelligent or unintelligent, and we have already shown it to be inadmissible that intelligence results from matter and motion. The cause then for which we are seeking is an original self-existent cause ; in other words, it is God.

Having proceeded thus far we will now inquire whether we are to conclude that there is only one self-existent intelligent being, or whether we find reason to believe in the existence of a plurality of gods. Now all that we know of what is commonly called the works of nature combines to establish one point, that the whole is contrived and designed by one or more intelligent beings, and that if more than one exist, they concur in the same uniform design. The notion

of the affairs of the universe being carried on by conflicting powers, the one intending good and the other evil, has disappeared in the process of scientific investigation. All which we call contrivance in the works of nature indicates benevolence in the contriver, and whatever of evil exists appears to arise incidentally, and must be traced either to want of wisdom or of power in the contriver, or to causes which lie beyond the reach of our apprehension. I will not here enter on the inquiry, which of these solutions of the difficulty we ought to adopt: that question I shall attempt to answer hereafter; but we are now inquiring whether there be any reason to believe that the universe was produced not by one only, but by a plurality of intelligent beings. On this subject I believe all thinking men are now agreed. Any one who has to explain any phænomena whatever which may be accounted for by the operation of a single cause, would be considered to take a very unphilosophical course if he were to assert that the facts in question were produced by a plurality of causes. This would be a relinquishing of a well-known law of philosophizing laid down by Newton, and universally admitted by philosophers, and it would be a supposition perfectly gratuitous and uncalled for by the phænomena to be explained. Now there is absolutely no ground at all for denying that every thing in the universe of which we have any knowledge may have been created by one Being of stupendous and immeasurable power and wisdom, and the mind having advanced to this conception, finds it perfectly satisfactory and acquiesces in its truth. It is nothing to the purpose to say that we can attain no distinct notion how intellec-

tual and material existences could have been called into being by the volition of the Great First Cause. We have seen already that the phænomena of the material and of the intellectual world necessarily lead to the conclusion that eternal intelligence has produced the whole ; and when we consider that there is not an object around us which does not present difficulties beyond the power of man to solve, and that our notions of causation are exceedingly obscure, we ought not to be at all surprised to find ourselves quite incompetent to arrive at a clear conception of the creative power which formed the universe. We have abundant reason to believe that the universe was created by God. With that we ought to be satisfied, and indeed it is by no means easy to say what it is that we wish to know beyond this.

Seeing then sufficient reason for unhesitating belief in the existence of one Great First Cause of the universe and every being and thing which it contains, the mind is naturally led to the inquiry whether we have any, and if any, what means of judging of the ends and purposes for which the Almighty created the universe, and particularly of his designs as to ourselves. Here we must be struck at the first step of our progress with the inadequacy of our faculties to the full comprehension of this vast subject. It would be supreme folly, or rather it would be insanity to suppose that we, the creatures of a day, are able to comprehend the whole design of the Deity in the creation of the spiritual and of the material world. Thousands of purposes may have been intended and fully carried into effect which we are no more capable of understanding than an infant is of comprehending the

Newtonian philosophy. It would however be a great error, and would be fatal to all religion, were we to admit, that because we cannot comprehend the whole design of the Deity in creation, we are incapable of understanding any part of it. The very foundation of religion is a sense of the relation in which we stand to our Creator, of the duties which he requires of us, and of the expectation of his favour which we may entertain on our performance of those duties. If reason and our moral faculty can teach us nothing respecting the character of the Deity and his intentions towards us, there can be no such thing as natural religion, and, to say the least, the foundation of revealed religion will be much shaken. "He that cometh to God," says the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, "must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him;" and unless we are satisfied not only of the existence of God, but also that we may rely on his promises, it is difficult to see how we can place any confidence in what professes to be a revelation of his will. It seems therefore essential to religion, or at any rate it is an important preparation for our receiving the truths of revelation, that we should be able to form some just conception of the attributes of God, and of his purposes respecting ourselves.

We do, and we must of necessity, derive our notions of the Deity in a great measure from what we know of man, the highest intellectual, and the only moral, being with whom our experience in this world makes us acquainted. Imperfect as the analogy must necessarily be between the Creator and the creature whom he has formed, difficult as it is

* Chap. xi. 6.

to compare a finite being with the Infinite, it is the only mode which we have, independent of revealed religion, of forming any conception whatever of God. Natural and revealed religion are the two great branches which we shall have to consider in the prosecution of this work; and preparatory to the consideration of those all-important subjects, we are now directing our attention to the conceptions which our faculties enable us to form of the Deity.

We have already seen that the phænomena of the intellectual and of the material world lead us to ascribe to God power and wisdom to which we can assign no limits; and that there is no appearance of the existence of any antagonistic power capable in any degree of opposing or limiting the operations of the Deity. The power and wisdom of God, then, we believe to be infinite. Now as it is impossible to conceive that every sentient and intelligent being should not will his own happiness, we cannot but consider that the Deity is perfectly happy; and that there is not, nor ever can be, any being or thing in existence capable in the slightest degree of interfering with, or diminishing his happiness. We find in ourselves that benevolence is a great source of happiness; that every act by which we endeavour to advance the well-being of others is attended by an agreeable feeling, and is always regarded by us with satisfaction and approbation. On the other hand, malevolence not only inflicts misery on others, but is in general a fruitful source of unhappiness to the agent. It is indeed true that a pleasure attends the gratification of revenge, but it is evanescent in its nature, leads to no pleasing feeling in the retrospect, and is never approved of by the

moral faculty. Of all the malignant passions, revenge alone has anything even transiently pleasurable. Envy, jealousy, hatred, each throws an ingredient of bitterness into the cup of life. Previously therefore to investigating the works of nature, for the purpose of discovering, so far as our faculties will enable us to do so, the intentions of the Deity as to ourselves, we should naturally be led from the analogy of our own minds to conclude that God was entirely free from anything bearing the slightest resemblance to the malignant passions to which our nature is unhappily subject. We should with some confidence exclude every kind and degree of malignity from our conception of the Divine character. Our benevolent feelings and sentiments are always objects of approbation, and they seem worthy of eternal duration. We cannot imagine any being in whom we should not consider benevolence an excellence, nor could any character, however excellent in other particulars, command our esteem without it. It is then perfectly consistent with our best sentiments to presume *à priori* that the Deity was prompted to the mighty work of creation by benevolence; that he made his creatures for the purpose of conferring happiness upon them. We cannot pretend to understand the nature of the happiness of the Divine Being; but as conferring good on others is one of the best and purest sources of our own felicity, it is not at any rate inconsistent with the most exalted notions which we are capable of forming of the Creator, that the happiness he confers on his creatures may be a source of his own felicity. On this subject, however, we know and can know nothing.

Let us, then, turn our attention to what we perceive

around us, and consider what evidence the phænomena of the sentient and intellectual world afford of the benevolent designs of the Creator. We shall indeed find the work ready done to our hand in many excellent treatises on natural theology which form no small part of the treasures of English literature. To whatever branch of this most extensive and most interesting subject the active genius of man has directed its attention, a similar result has always followed. In every organized being there has invariably been found an arrangement of parts admirably fitted for the preservation of the life of the animal, and for its enjoyment ; for guarding it from accidents and annoyances in the state of life to which it is destined ; for a constant supply of nourishment for its daily wastes ; and for a power of restoration or renewing parts which have been accidentally injured or destroyed. In the human body we discern a most complicated system of mechanism carried to extreme minuteness, of the most delicate character, very liable indeed to injury, but nevertheless so admirably adapted to its situation as often to endure 80, 90, or 100 years, during all which periods the lungs continue to breathe, the heart to expand and contract, and the blood to pursue its course through the veins and arteries without a moment's cessation. How wonderful must be the skill which formed the human body, and enabled it thus and for so long a time to exercise its functions for the preservation and the well-being of man ! Well may the Psalmist say that we are " fearfully and wonderfully made ! " Well may the religious poet exclaim, " Strange, that a harp of thousand strings should last in tune so long ! " But the mechanical organization is

by no means all that is wonderful and admirable in the structure of the human body ; which is also a laboratory wherein chemical operations are continually going on, essential to the preservation and the healthy condition of man. These matters are so well known, and have so often been clearly and ably laid before the public in full detail, as to render it unnecessary to do more in this place than to refer to them as admitted facts.

The human mind as well as the body affords strong testimony to the benevolent intention of the Maker of all in the formation of man. We have a rational and a moral faculty, and both, when directed to the purposes for which they are evidently intended, are sources of great enjoyment. How much of the happiness of life is derived from the occupation of the mind in the investigation of truth, in the acquisition of useful knowledge, in reflection, in intellectual conversation, and in applying our knowledge in various ways for the benefit of ourselves and of our fellow-creatures ! With respect to our moral pleasures, they rank among the highest and most important. Without them, indeed, we should find little in human life worthy of our regard. Take away the domestic charities, the delights of friendship, and the enjoyments which are the result of kindness bestowed and accepted, and little indeed would remain to cheer us in our passage through the world. The most exalted intellect, the highest genius feel the want of some to whom their discoveries and their reflections may be imparted. We all wish to be loved, and if any one could be found with no yearnings for the kindness and affection of his fellow-creatures, he would be sunk

into a state of sullen selfishness totally inconsistent with a happy existence. If then both the body and the mind of man are made for enjoyment, if all the contrivance which we can trace in creation appears to have a benevolent object, how can we hesitate to believe that the object of God in creation was the happiness of the creatures whom he formed?

The only objection which can, I think, be made to the benevolent intention of the Creator in the formation of the universe, arises from the existence of physical and of moral evil, which, it must be admitted, prevail to a very great extent indeed in the world. How is this to be accounted for under the dominion of a Being of almighty power, and of perfect wisdom and goodness? Either, says the objector, God had the power to create the universe without the evil which now exists and he would not, or he had the will to do so and he could not: on the first supposition, you deny his perfect goodness, on the second, his wisdom or his power. Now this objection appears to me to assume that we have a more distinct conception of the attributes of the Deity and of the universe, than our limited faculties can possibly attain. We have already seen that all which (in the most appropriate language we can use) we call design and contrivance in the universe, indicates a benevolent intention in the Designer, and that there is no appearance anywhere of the end not being benevolent, or of the means not being suited to attain the end. The wisdom and goodness of the Deity we, therefore, properly conclude to be perfect. With respect to the power of God, we say that he is almighty, because we can discern nowhere any trace of a power

independent of him, and acting in hostility to him, consequently we can discover nothing capable of controlling his will. So far our apprehensions can go, but no further. With respect to the evils which afflict humanity, we know that human virtue is mainly formed by encountering and overcoming evil in one shape or other. "Sweet are the uses of adversity," and by the "sadness of the countenance the heart is made better." Human life is a continual struggle with temptation to do wrong, and excellence of character is attained by success in the contest. Surely it would be an over-bold and presumptuous assertion, that the existence of such a being as man is inconsistent with the perfection of the Divine attributes; yet we see that a contact with evil, and a contention with it are essential to the formation of his character to virtue, in other words, to its highest and best state. We perceive then plainly the subservience of evil to good in this case, and we are not in a condition to say that all the evil that exists in the universe is not of the like character. But, says the objector, why might not the good have been attained without the evil? I can only answer that I do not know, and that I am not concerned to know. There is, in inquiries of this sort, much which lies beyond the boundaries of human apprehension. When we consider the action of material substances on one another, we easily perceive that it is calculated to produce, and that it does produce, beneficial results; but if we are asked why matter was created with the particular qualities which belong to it, we have no answer to give. The subject is beyond our reach. In like manner we can give no reason why man is made

as he is. Our only way of understanding such subjects as we are now considering, is by observing the relation which one being or thing bears to another, their connexion with each other, and their mutual action; and if these tend to good, as we have already seen that they do, they afford abundant reason for our being satisfied of the benevolent design of the Creator. More especially should we be diffident in forming conclusions on this abstruse subject, when we are acquainted with a very small part of the universe, and for a very limited duration. We see but a speck of that universe which fills immensity, and which is destined to endure through eternity. No one will presume to assign any bounds to the universe; and it would exceed the wildest ravings of insanity to suppose that a period can ever arrive when all existence shall be brought to an end, and absolutely nothing shall remain. When we direct our thoughts to the contemplation of the Deity, and of his work, we must feel at every step which we take the inadequacy of our conceptions, and how very little way we can see into this incomprehensible and infinite subject. A humble sense of the limited nature of our faculties should make us very careful not to indulge in dogmatical assertions about things beyond the reach of our apprehensions. It is surely proper for weak, short-sighted man to confess that the full understanding of this subject lies beyond his comprehension; and that though he cannot account for the existence of evil in the world, it would savour more of presumption than of wisdom if we were to pronounce it to be inconsistent with any of the attributes of the Deity. There may be reasons for it, which

the human mind in its best and most improved state is incapable of understanding. Let us then confess our incapacity, and leave the existence of evil among the deep things of God, which are to us, in our present state, inscrutable. Possibly He may in a more advanced stage of our existence enable us to attain a solution of what, in our condition in this world, must always be a painful and unintelligible subject.

Power, wisdom and goodness, then, we have seen reason to ascribe to God, and these comprise all the attributes which, according to our apprehension, make up the perfection of the Divine character. Other words are indeed often used in mentioning the attributes of God. We shall have occasion hereafter to consider the attribute of justice, which is often represented as distinct from benevolence. In this sense, however, it can be only applied to the Almighty as a moral Governor and not as a Creator. Certainly we could not, before we were created, be objects of the justice of God. If the term justice can be properly used of the Creator, as such, it must be only in this sense—that it would be unjust in the Deity to create any being and to place him in such circumstances, that his existence would prove a curse and not a blessing. But this horrible supposition would rather be described under the term malevolence than that of injustice, which always is referred to something in the object deserving of praise or censure, reward or punishment.

PART II.

NATURAL RELIGION.

THOSE who admit the correctness of the views of the Divine character stated above, cannot fail to perceive that they afford a solid foundation of Natural Religion. If indeed the Deity be all-wise, and powerful, and good, we have abundant reason to be confident that he will in all cases do that which is right, and that his providence watches over the works of his hands, and directs all things for the best. As I do not find that the wisest of the ancient philosophers ever fully attained this cheering view of the Divine character, I feel it impossible to doubt that what is now called Natural Religion is a light reflected in a great measure from Revelation. The views of the character and attributes of the Great Author of all set forth in the Old Testament, and far more fully enunciated in the New, have afforded the means by which the modern theist has been enabled to attain far clearer and more exalted notions of natural religion than ever flowed from the reflections and investigations of the ancients. But though revealed religion has led us into the right path of inquiry, the arguments in favour of natural religion are so satisfactory as to afford of themselves a reason for regulating our characters and conduct with reference to the will of God, though we should not be able to yield our assent to the truth of revealed religion. That we have abundant reason to

do so, will be attempted to be shown hereafter. At present we will consider natural as entirely independent of revealed religion.

We are sent into the world with a rational and a moral faculty, both in a rudimental state, and both developing themselves by slow degrees. From small beginnings we learn to employ our reason in deducing conclusions from what we perceive external to ourselves, and from what passes in our own mind; and our ability to reason grows with our growth and strengthens with our strength, and at length enables some favoured individuals to comprehend the profoundest dogmas of science and philosophy. Others are carried on by the wondrous powers of the imagination to extend the bounds of human thought, and to produce the marvellous creations of painting, of sculpture, of architecture and of poetry, by which the world has been delighted, refined, and improved. All the workings of the intellect, when properly directed, tend not only to the embellishment of human life, but to the improvement of the human character in wisdom and virtue. This is a legitimate though indirect result of the working of our rational faculty, but it is the direct and immediate object of the moral nature which God has given us. We are naturally disposed to love and honour all that is good, to feel gratitude for benefits received, esteem and reverence for the benefactors of their race, compassion for the afflicted, and a desire to relieve their distresses. These good dispositions are indeed liable to be counteracted by many opposing influences arising from self-interest and from the unrestrained working of the passions; but very rarely indeed is the moral faculty so far deteriorated,

even in persons whose conduct is but little influenced by it, as to destroy their respect for what is really good in all cases where their own interest and passions are not concerned.

Religion addresses itself both to our rational and to our moral nature. Reason enables us to trace all existence to one great first cause ; and by contemplating the moral perfections of the Deity, we are naturally led to fix our highest regards on him. Surely it is a marvellous inconsistency to love and reverence the good we find in men, and to be unmoved at the contemplation of the moral attributes of him from whom is derived every good and every perfect gift. How exalted, how soul-absorbing is the contemplation of one unspeakably Great Spirit ; who formed, and who preserves all things ; by whom are directed all the complicated movements of the universe ; and who makes all things to work together for good to his creatures ! It seems impossible that these views should be entertained of the Divine character, without impressing the mind with love and veneration in the highest degree. These effects then might be expected to flow from a sincere belief in natural religion. To the best and noblest of the human race it may be so ; but these are a very small fraction of mankind ; and we shall, I think, find on investigation that natural religion is wholly insufficient, in affording those motives which are requisite to discipline the great mass of mankind to virtuous conduct ; to excite in their minds a just and deep sense of the relation in which they stand to their Maker ; and to make them feel, that it is alike their duty and their interest to yield obedience in all things to his holy will. Self-interest and inordinate passions

are extremely powerful agents in human characters ; and more mighty counteracting principles are required to control them than natural religion can produce. When self-interest is the predominant principle, it is necessary to restrain it by pointing out a higher interest than any which is confined to this world alone ; and when the character is vitiated by the predominance of passion, a more powerful passion must be excited to counteract its force. From what source then are these antagonistic forces to be derived ? The answer is plain : the belief of a future state of rewards and punishment (as it is usually called) can alone supply sufficient motives to overrule the evil influences of passion and self-interest. The tendency of virtuous conduct is undoubtedly in general to the happiness of the individual in this world, and, supposing external circumstances to be the same, the most virtuous will always be the happiest men. But this is far from being the case. It often happens that vicious men are gifted with fine constitutions, and pass through life in uninterrupted prosperity. On the other hand, the virtuous man is frequently beset by disease and sickness, and is as liable as others to ill success in his worldly pursuits, and to be reduced to privation, to poverty, and to actual want. Even his consolations are little understood by the world at large. The worldly man knows nothing of the peace and tranquillity which result from virtuous conduct, nor can he be made to comprehend it. He sees that persons of virtuous character are subject to the ordinary ills of life, and that their principles of integrity often prevent them from obtaining worldly advantages which are procured by those who entertain no such scruples. To their apprehension, all advantages are ranged on

the side of those who make self-interest their leading principle of action. To this class of persons—and it is to be feared that a majority of the human race fall within it—no motive can be found adequate to produce a change of character and conduct except the expectation of greater gain hereafter, which no one can deny may be found in a future state. Now then comes the question, can a future state be proved by the mere light of nature? Volumes have been written to prove the natural immortality of the soul; and arguments of much ingenuity, and of some force, have been advanced in support of that opinion, but none I think which will give full and entire satisfaction to an inquiring mind. To him who examines the subject fairly and dispassionately, the result will, as it seems to me, not go beyond doubt and suspense of judgment. It is to the sure word of revelation that we must look for full satisfaction. If the gospel be true, then indeed has Jesus Christ brought life and immortality to light; all our doubts on the unspeakably important subject of a future existence beyond the grave are fully dispelled, and unhesitating faith takes their place. The uncertainty as to a future life which belongs to natural religion, must always prevent its having sufficient force to counteract the evil passions of men. Passion is often too strong for self-interest. It frequently requires a considerable strength of resolution to prefer future good to present gratification, and in proportion as the passions are stronger than that calm desire for our future welfare, which we call a regard to self-interest, must the opposing force be powerful to make an effectual resistance. The firm belief in a future state of retribution, as we know by lamentable ex-

perience, is often found insufficient to check the torrent of passion; how then can we expect that, to say the most, a hesitating and doubting assent to the doctrine of man's immortality can have that effect?

But if we were to admit that natural religion affords sufficient proof of a future state, what information can it give us of its nature, and of our future condition in the world to come? Brought up and educated in a Christian country, our minds are necessarily furnished with Christian ideas on this subject, and the future world is constantly represented as a state of rewards and punishments. This language is indeed, as to one branch of the subject, erroneous and reprehensible. As all we have is from God, as all our powers mental and corporeal are his gifts, as we owe to him our existence, which if we are not wanting to ourselves will be an unspeakable blessing, we can, under no circumstances, be entitled to claim a reward from him: all the enjoyment we can ever have in this world or in that which is to come, can properly be considered in no other light than as derived from his bounty; and if he should confer upon us the happiness of the next world, as a consequence of our obedience to his holy will here, it will be a gift, and not, in strict propriety of language, a reward. It is probable, however, that no one has ever believed in a future state, without also connecting with that belief an expectation that our condition in the next world will depend on what we have done in this. But here arises an important question. Every religion which has prevailed in any part of the world, has had its rules of faith and practice which have been held obligatory on those who admit its authority. Now it is certain that few, if any, in whatever age or country, and under whatever dispen-

sation of religion, have yielded a complete obedience to its laws, and in the whole course of their lives abstained from every act of disobedience. The great mass of mankind, and probably the whole human race, must stand in the condition of offenders against the law of God. Admitting then that they would have become entitled to the happiness of the future state if their obedience had been entire and complete, what can we determine as to those who have lost their claim by disobedience to the divine law? The Christian Scriptures teach the efficacy of repentance, but on this subject natural religion appears to be quite silent.

The just result of our investigation then seems to be, that a sense of the perfections of the Deity will afford a ground for religious feelings and principles which will affect, to a considerable extent, the minds and influence the character and conduct of those who are virtuously disposed; but that on the minds and hearts of the great mass of mankind, it is not calculated to produce much effect: that the grounds it affords for the expectation of a future life, are not so satisfactory as greatly to operate in inducing men to lead virtuous and religious lives; and that it holds out no certain hope to the sinner that his sins will be forgiven on repentance. If these views be just, it follows that something more is wanting to give consolation to the human race amid the sorrows and conflicts of this life, and to afford them a hope of obtaining eternal felicity in the world to come. These deficiencies the Christian Religion undertakes to supply. We will proceed to examine whether it presents itself under such circumstances, as will compel us to admit the validity of its claims, and to yield obedience to its commands.

PART III.

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

HAVING concluded what I had to say respecting natural religion, let us now proceed to the inquiry, whether we have sufficient reason to believe that God has revealed himself to his creatures through the instrumentality of individuals to whom he has given supernatural knowledge and power, and whom he has entrusted with authority to declare his will to the human race. Respecting the vast importance of this inquiry there can be no difference of opinion, unless any should be found who have made up their minds that a revelation of the Divine will is in itself wholly incredible, and incapable of proof by any evidence whatever. I shall endeavour hereafter to show that such an opinion is without any rational foundation, and we will at once proceed with our inquiry concerning the truth of revelation.

Many religions, in different ages and in different parts of the world, have claimed to be revelations of the Divine will ; but the inquiry will here be confined to the claims of the Christian religion to Divine authority. The course to be pursued will be, in the first place, to examine the facts of its origin and early history, and then to consider its progress in the world ; the changes it has produced in the condition of the human race ; its present state, and its future prospects. All these subjects will be considered very

generally, and all unnecessary detail will be carefully avoided.

With respect to the origin of the Christian religion, no difference of opinion will probably be found among persons competently informed, and of any degree of candour. That it was first promulgated by Jesus Christ, a Jew, and a native of Palestine, there is abundant reason to admit, as well from the assertion of heathen, as of Christian writers who lived near the time; accounts of his life, his teachings, his death, and his resurrection from the dead, have come down to us in the four gospels, two of which are ascribed to two apostles, and the other two to individuals who are represented by tradition to have been friends and followers of the apostles. I shall make no further use of the gospel narratives in this place than to treat them as credible accounts of the ordinary facts mentioned in them; claiming neither for them, nor for him whose history they tell, any Divine authority, nor asserting the truth of any thing miraculous in their history. These are matters which will be considered hereafter. For the present, I content myself with the assertion that they are credible narrations of the common facts of their history.

The origin of the Christian religion, which now, in some form or other, is the professed religion of all the most civilized nations in the globe, is the fact for which we have to account. Its commencement is asserted by all Christian and by many heathen writers to have been in Palestine between eighteen and nineteen centuries ago. All the writers on the subject agree in ascribing its origin to Jesus Christ, a native of Palestine. We have come down to us from very

early times four narratives of his life, three of which bear a close resemblance to each other, and, for the most part, give accounts of the same transactions. The fourth narrative, which professes to be written by a person very intimately connected with Jesus, contains much which is not found in the writings of the other evangelists ; but, in the concluding scenes, relates the same facts. All these narratives are written with great simplicity ; without any appearance of studied composition, and without eulogium or comments on the character of the subject of the narratives. They have in themselves all the marks of a true and authentic biography ; and we have no other writings in existence which contradict them, or are in any way inconsistent with them. On what ground, then, can we be called upon to reject these narratives ? Observe, I am in this place only treating them as credible narrations of common facts. Their claim to anything supernatural will be considered hereafter. For the present I lay it down that they are to be held authentic histories of the origin of the Christian religion. What, then, is the account they give ? I will say nothing here of the narratives of the birth and parentage of Jesus contained in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, but will take up the history at the time when he began to promulgate his religion by publicly teaching in Judea and Galilee. We find him then described as a Jew of humble origin ; appearing to the world as the son of a carpenter who resided at Nazareth ; and apparently himself employed in the same trade as his supposed father. There is no reason to think that he enjoyed any advantage of education beyond others in his

station in life ; and we have no other account beyond his being, in one instance, called a carpenter, in what manner or in what employment he spent the early years of his life. About the age of thirty he appeared as a public teacher of religion.

Previously, however, to making any observations on the conduct and teachings of Jesus Christ, it will be proper to direct our attention to a very remarkable person, John the Baptist.

The account of his first appearance as a religious teacher is given in the gospel of St. Matthew in the following words : “ In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye ; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. And the same John had his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins ; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. Then went out to him all Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan confessing their sins.*”

From the authoritative style of the Baptist we might reasonably expect that it was his intention to become the head of a new religion. This, however, he entirely disclaims ; and he points the attention of his hearers to one who is to follow him ; and who is greater and mightier than himself. “ I indeed,” he says, “ baptize you with water unto repentance : but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear : he shall baptize you

* Matt. iii. 1-6. See also Mark i. 1-6 ; Luke iii. 1-6.

with the Holy Ghost, and with fire*.” After this declaration Jesus himself comes to be baptized of John, whereupon John thus addresses him: “I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? †” I can see then no reason to doubt that John the Baptist appeared in Judea in the character of a religious teacher; that he professed to come as the forerunner of one of greater authority than himself; and that he distinctly pointed out Jesus as that individual. This last circumstance is fully proved in the texts from St. John’s gospel referred to in the note below.

Here then we have an account of a man who appeared in Judea, exhorted his hearers to repent of their sins, and performed the rite of baptism on a great number of individuals; but who was so far from setting himself up as the head of a new religion as to assume the character of a precursor of one greater than himself, and who pointed out Jesus as the individual for whose appearance he was preparing the way. Now there is certainly nothing incredible in any part of this narrative. John professed, and, no doubt, believed himself to be acting under a Divine commission as the precursor of the Messiah. This claim may or may not have been well founded; but, for the present, we have nothing to do with that question; our business now being only to consider the common facts of the gospel, leaving everything supernatural for future examination. The narration then is simply this: That a man, who believes himself to be divinely authorized and appointed for the

* Matt. iii. 11.

† Matt. iii. 14. See also John i. 19–36.

purpose, preaches repentance from sin to his hearers ; exhorts them to the performance of good works ; institutes them into a new religion by baptism ; and refers them to another teacher pointed out by him, whose forerunner he professes to be, and to whom he represents himself as subordinate. I draw no other conclusions from these facts, than that the Baptist was sincere, that he actually believed himself to be what he professed, and that the object of his teaching was to lead his hearers to repentance, and to the performance of the duties of religion. There is not the slightest appearance in the narrative that he was actuated by ambitious motives. He was followed by a multitude of people over whom he exercised great influence. Can it be doubted that, if ambition had been the principle of his conduct, he would have reserved to himself the chief authority as the head of the new religion ? But he does no such thing ; on the contrary, he represents his own preaching as preparatory to the appearance of another. " He," John says, " must increase, but I must decrease*."

Having seen, then, that John the Baptist was a preacher of repentance, and of righteousness ; that he professed himself to be the forerunner of a teacher superior to himself, and that he pointed out Jesus as that person, let us now proceed to the account of the latter contained in the four gospels. I shall here consider these narratives as credible accounts of ordinary facts ; leaving everything miraculous for future consideration. That they have a just title to be so esteemed will appear from the following considerations. Without pretending to fix the dates of any

* John iii. 30.

of the gospels, it will be sufficient to say, that they were received at a very early period in the Christian church; that they have been always ascribed to the authors whose names they bear, two of whom were apostles, and the other two have always been held to have been friends and followers of apostles; and that they have been handed down from age to age, as the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Now this is precisely the sort of evidence on which we receive all ancient writings; and we can have no other. I can perceive no more reason for doubting that the apostle Matthew was the author of the gospel which is called by his name, than that Xenophon and Tacitus were the authors of their respective histories. Those who wish for minute and detailed accounts of the evidence of the authenticity of the gospels may find full satisfaction in Lardner's great work on the 'Credibility of the Gospel History.'

The first three gospels contain, for the most part, narratives of the same facts and the same discourses, differing in some particulars, but agreeing in the main; having in that respect precisely the character which is usually found in the accounts given by different individuals of the same transactions. None of the authors of the gospels appear to have written in strictly chronological order.

As the question which we shall in the end have to consider is, whether the Christian religion is really of divine authority; and as we can only form a judgment by the exercise of our rational and our moral faculties of the claim of any religion to be a divine revelation; I shall now proceed to a review of the life

and teaching of Jesus Christ, with the object of showing what he taught his disciples to be, and to do; and whether those instructions approve themselves to our reason and to our moral sentiments. I shall pursue the narrative of the life of Jesus in the order in which the events seem to have happened; making use of all the gospels, and availing myself of the light which one of these narratives may throw upon another.

The public teaching of Jesus commenced after his baptism by John, and his temptation in the wilderness. The first account which we have of his life, after these transactions, relates his interviews and conversation with Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael, and is in the Gospel of St. John; who also gives an account of the presence of Jesus at a marriage feast in Cana of Galilee; but, as neither of these parts of that gospel contains any general precepts or commandments, I shall pass them over without further notice. In the third chapter of the same gospel occurs one of the most important passages in the New Testament. The evangelist had just narrated a remarkable dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. There is great obscurity in this conversation, and the interpretation of it has led to much controversy. It does not fall within my present purpose to make any comments on it. It appears to me to end with the 15th verse; and what follows I believe to be the remarks of the author of the gospel. The texts to which I now refer (v. 16, 17), are as follows: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent

not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." Here we have distinctly stated the object of Christ appearing in the world. He was, according to the evangelist, sent by his Father on a mission of mercy for the salvation of sinners. This is the first declaration of the purpose of the ministry of Jesus; and it is in perfect consistency with all future representations of it. In a remarkable conversation with a woman of Samaria in the same gospel (iv. 21-24), in answer to a question of the woman respecting the proper place for offering worship to God, Jesus indicates the universality of the religion which he was going to set up; and clearly declares its spiritual character. "Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." In the 5th chapter, in a conversation with the Jews, Jesus expresses himself in the following words, v. 19-30: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth: and he will show him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son

quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me." Now in this memorable passage we find Jesus Christ declaring that all his authority is derived from the Father; that there will be a resurrection from the dead to a future life, in which men will be treated accordingly as they have done good or evil in this life. It must also be observed, that the promise of eternal life is to those who believe in his divine mission.

In perfect consistency with what Jesus taught above, we find him afterwards at the feast of tabernacles using the following words, John vii. 16, 17: "My

doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." Here is an express promise that the doctrine shall be made known to those who do the will of God. There is here no arbitrary preference of one man to another ; but the preparation for the reception of divine revelation is obedience to the will of God. By what means the obedient servants of God will be able to judge of the truth of the doctrine of Christ I shall consider hereafter when I have to treat of his claims to divine authority.

After this Jesus went into Galilee, and commenced his preaching there with an exhortation to repentance. "Repent : for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matt. iv. 17)." Afterwards he ascends a mountain, and delivers what is usually called the Sermon on the Mount, the whole of which is contained in the 5th, 6th and 7th chapters of St. Matthew's gospel ; and many parts of it are found scattered in different portions of the gospel of St. Luke. It is the longest discourse in the gospels which is addressed to the general body of his hearers, and its contents are of the highest importance, as fully stating the purpose and object of his mission. He begins by pronouncing blessings on the poor in spirit, on those who mourn, on the meek, on those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, on the merciful, on the pure in heart, and on the peace-makers. He then adds, what probably astonished a great part of his hearers, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all man-

ner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." The proud character of the Jewish people is well known. Considering themselves as the chosen people of God, they entertained the profoundest contempt for the gentile world. Their subjection to the Romans was most galling to them; and the whole nation looked forward to their promised Messiah, fully confiding in his delivering them from the Romans, and setting up a kingdom of his own far superior to any earthly dominion. In these sentiments even the chosen followers of Jesus, the apostles, concurred, as we shall see hereafter. If, therefore, the object of Jesus had been to conciliate popular favour to his claims as the Messiah, he would have availed himself of the general feeling, and endeavoured to incite them to such exertions as would be necessary to enable him to head an enterprise for throwing off the Roman yoke. On the contrary, his exhortations in the sermon on the mount are all of a peaceable and gentle character; and he anticipates for his followers, instead of a participation in the triumph of their leader in establishing the liberties of their country, a state of persecution and suffering, in which he instructs them that they ought to rejoice. All his exhortations are in favour of moral excellence. The disciples are to let their light so shine before men, that they may see their good works, and glorify their Father which is in heaven. He tells his hearers that whosoever shall break one of the least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall

do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven : and he adds, " For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." Now as the persons alluded to were leading characters among the Jews, and as the Pharisees had always been distinguished by a strong profession of zeal for religion, Jesus by making this declaration was raising enemies against himself in the most powerful and influential class of the Jewish nation. Neither here nor anywhere else in the gospel history is there the slightest indication of his being actuated by worldly motives ; or of his having any other end in view than to induce his hearers to repent of their sins, to receive him as acting under divine authority ; to lead religious and virtuous lives in this world ; and to hope for everlasting felicity in the world to come.

The exhortations throughout the sermon on the mount are so pure and holy ; approve themselves so entirely to our moral nature ; so accord with the best lessons of the wisest philosophers ; and are in themselves so complete, as to enable every reflecting mind to perceive that if these precepts were indeed to become the ruling principles of the world, a very great part of the evils of life would vanish away ; and a state of virtue and happiness would prevail beyond the visions of the most sanguine philanthropist. Having thus noticed the general character of the sermon on the mount, I shall not load my pages with numerous quotations, but shall merely advert to some few texts which seem to require particular notice.

There is no doubt that exhortations closely re-

sembling many of those in the sermon on the mount may be found in the works of the ancient philosophers (though never, I think, given in the authoritative style assumed by Jesus); but I am not aware that there are in the writings of any of the philosophers, such sentiments of sublime virtue as what follows: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you."

I shall quote the concluding paragraph of this incomparable discourse, in order to show that the religion of Jesus is practical; and that all professions are utterly worthless when the character has not been governed by Christian principles. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? and then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it." The evangelist goes on to say: "And

it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."

Nothing indeed is more remarkable in the teaching of Jesus than the air of authority which he constantly assumes. It seems impossible for any candid person to read the gospel narrative, and not to perceive that Jesus acted throughout the whole of his ministry with the firm conviction that he was authorised and instructed by God to teach a new religion to the world. Whether or not this claim was well founded will be matter for future consideration. At present we have only to do with the fact of his having believed it, on which subject I cannot entertain a doubt. It may be observed that he had not at this time put forth to the Jews his claim to be their promised Messiah, though he had assumed that character in his conversation with the woman of Samaria. He left the Jews to draw their own conclusions from his teaching and his conduct.

I shall make no other observation on the two next occurrences in the life of Jesus, the curing of the leper and of the centurion's son, recorded in Matt. viii., Mark i. and Luke v., but that he assumed on these, and many other occasions, the power of working miracles. Whether he really possessed that power will be the subject of inquiry in a subsequent part of this work.

After this we find Jesus acting in direct opposition to the feelings and practices of that straitest sect of the Jews, who affected peculiar holiness and the strictest regard to the law. Matt. ix. 10-15: "And

it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.” In the parallel passage, Mark ii. 18, the inquiry respecting fasting is made by the disciples of John and the Pharisees; and in Luke v. 33, the scribes and Pharisees alone are represented as making the inquiry. Both Mark and Luke report the question of Jesus to have been, Can the children of the bridechamber *fast*? This agrees best with the context. It therefore seems probable that the word *mourn* has been inserted by mistake in Matthew’s gospel instead of *fast*. It appears from Griesbach’s edition of the New Testament that *fast* is the reading of the very ancient Cambridge MS., and that there are other authorities for that reading. Observe, that in the passage above referred to, Jesus distinctly states the purpose of his mission to be, to call sinners to repentance. The efficacy of repentance to procure the pardon of sin is uniformly taught by him. We find Jesus on this

occasion putting himself in opposition to the most powerful and influential of his countrymen ; associating with those who were the objects of their contempt ; and not complying with what they considered a religious duty, and on which they laid great stress. He acts quite independently ; and appears here, and everywhere, as a teacher of practical righteousness, and of the efficacy of repentance to procure the pardon of sin. From whatever source he derived the religion which he promulgated, it is plain that he did not acquire it by the instruction of the scribes and Pharisees, or of any other class of his countrymen. He says he was sent from God. The validity of his claim will be considered hereafter.

In the next recorded transaction, sending forth his twelve disciples, we find Jesus assuming not only authority to set up a new religion, and to work miracles, but that of conferring the like power on his apostles. “ Go not,” he says (Matt. x. 5–8), “ into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not : but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils : freely ye have received, freely give.” There is nothing of fanaticism in the instructions he gives to his followers. He tells them to expect persecution, but directs them to avoid it. Matt. x. 23 : “ But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another.” This commission to the apostles, it will be observed, is confined to the Jews. When they are called on to endure persecution they are to meet it with fortitude. Matt. x. 28–32 : “ Fear not them which kill the body,

but are not able to kill the soul : but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." And he declares, Matt. x. 37-39, " He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me ; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it ; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." After this the following interesting occurrence takes place, Luke x. 25-29 : " And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life ? He said unto him, What is written in the law ? how readest thou ? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind ; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right : this do and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour ? " Then follows the affecting story of a man who was wounded and left by thieves, whom a priest and a Levite passed by without regarding him, but who was relieved and provided for by a Samaritan. Jesus then asks the lawyer, Luke x. 36, " Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves ? " The lawyer answers, Luke x. 37, " He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise." It is well known that there was great hatred and aversion between the Jews and the Samaritans. We

find Jesus nevertheless making no concession to Jewish feelings and prejudices ; but, on the contrary, introducing one of a despised nation as fulfilling a duty which had been grossly neglected by those of the Jews to whom the people were accustomed to look up as their guides and instructors. Such a representation could not fail to be very offensive to the Jews ; and it appears perfectly clear that it was not the object of Jesus to procure their favour by any compromise with their prejudices and errors. Whatever else may be thought, it is certain his was at least an independent course of conduct.

As the principal object which I have now in view is to ascertain what it was that Jesus required his disciples to be and to do, I shall make no particular comment on the assertions of his divine authority which may be found in many parts of the gospel. The very essence of the Christian religion is the belief that it is from Heaven. He that does not believe that it really is a revelation from God, cannot be called, in any propriety of language, a Christian. If, as seems to be the case with some in the present day, a man by styling himself a Christian only means that he assents to the precepts of Jesus, as good in themselves, and calculated to improve the human race, he may be called a Christian, in the same sense that a follower of Aristotle is called an Aristotelian ; but that is quite a different meaning from that which from the earliest times has been given to the word Christian, and it is reasonable to expect, that he who gives a new sense to old and recognized terms should begin with an explanation of the meaning he annexes to them.

It may be proper to give a caution to those who

have not thoughtfully read the New Testament, to be careful not to adopt too literal an interpretation of its contents. This practice has often led to great and mischievous errors. By an over-literal understanding of particular texts they will appear at variance with the general tenor of the book. Such passages will be easily understood by those who have duly considered the peculiarities of Jewish phraseology. Luke xiv. 12-14: "When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours, lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." Now this was addressed to one of the chief Pharisees at whose table Jesus was actually dining at the time. One thing is clear from the narratives of all the evangelists, that the life and doctrine of Jesus were perfectly consistent. If then he had intended wholly to condemn such social meetings as that which he had joined on this occasion, there can be no reasonable doubt that he would have declined the invitation of the Pharisee. The object of the text in question is to point out the superior importance of relieving distress to the social engagements of society. In like manner, when Jesus tells his disciples that if one strike them on the left cheek, they should turn to him the right, he does not mean that this should be taken literally, but he intends to inculcate a gentle, peaceable and forgiving temper. So when he says that unless a man hate father and mother he cannot

be his disciple, he means that the principle of duty must be paramount in the Christian life, and that even the tenderest domestic feelings must be sacrificed when duty requires it. When Jesus was smitten before his crucifixion, he did not solicit further ill-treatment; and he showed a tender affection for his mother while he hung on the cross.

The parable of the prodigal son, contained in the 15th chapter of the gospel by Luke, is highly interesting, and is intended to set forth the readiness of the Almighty to receive repenting sinners to his favour.

Luke xii. 13, 14: "And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider among you?" Here we find Jesus disclaiming all civil authority, and, by so doing, setting himself in direct opposition to the expectations of the Jews, who looked to their promised Messiah as a deliverer from the dominion of the Romans, and as one who was to set up a kingdom of his own over them.

Matt. xvi. 21, 22: "From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again on the third day." Peter, who had just before acknowledged Jesus to be the Messiah, than began to rebuke him, saying, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee." This calls forth a severe observation from his Master. Thus we find Jesus acting in opposition not only to the feelings and expectations of the Jews in general, but also to those of his own immediate followers. How deeply

the expectation that their master was destined to set up a temporal kingdom had fixed itself in their minds, may be seen from a question asked of him by them after his resurrection, Acts i. 6 : "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"

Matt. xvii. 22 : "And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men; and they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry." From their great sorrow it may be inferred that they now believed in the prediction of Jesus, although they had refused their assent on the former occasion. This will prove of some importance in connexion with what took place after his death.

Matt. xviii. 1-3 : "At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." The virtue of humility is constantly enforced by Jesus. Of its value we shall have occasion to form an estimate hereafter. In the 14th verse of the same chapter he asserts, in the strongest terms, the mercy of God : "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish."

Forgiveness of injuries he inculcates in the strongest language. Luke xvii. 3, 4 : "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee,

saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him." His sentiments on this subject are even more strongly expressed, Matt. xviii. 21, 22: "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times, but until seventy times seven."

The following passage contains a rebuke of the spiritual pride of the Pharisees, and an encouragement to the penitent sinner. Luke xviii. 10-14: "Two men went into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself,—God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every man that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Here we have Jesus again setting himself in direct opposition to the feelings of his nation, among whom the Pharisees were followed and venerated, while the publicans or tax-gatherers were regarded with the utmost contempt and aversion.

Matt. xx. 25-28. Jesus having reproved the ambition of two of his disciples, James and John, whom he had distinguished by particular favours, inculcates humility in the following words:—"Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and that they that are great exercise authority upon

them. But it shall not be so among you : but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister ; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant : even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

We have now arrived at the last and the most important period of the life of Jesus : when he went up to Jerusalem ; was seized by the Jewish authorities ; delivered by them to the Roman governor ; and ended his life by a most cruel and ignominious death on the cross. Let us examine and consider the facts and discourses narrated by the four evangelists as having taken place on this occasion ; assuming, as heretofore, the truth of nothing but ordinary facts ; and leaving the most important question, whether Christianity be really what it purports to be, a revelation from God, for future consideration.

A design to apprehend Jesus, with a view to his being punished, had been formed before his arrival at Jerusalem. John xi. 57: "Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that, if any man knew where he were, he should shew it, that they might take him." At this time Jesus was held in high estimation by the people. His triumphant entry into Jerusalem is thus described, John xii. 12, 13: "On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna : blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord." His enemies on account of his popularity feared to lay hands on him openly in the sight of the multitude.

Matt. xxi. 46 : “ When they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.” They attempted, therefore, in the first instance, to entrap him in an act of disobedience to the Roman government, which would be a legal ground for his apprehension. Matt. xxii. 15–22 : “ Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man : for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou ? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not ? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites ? Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription ? They say unto him, Cæsar’s. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s. When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.” The Pharisees having thus completely failed in their attempt, their antagonists, the Sadducees, now endeavoured to puzzle Jesus, by an inquiry concerning the resurrection ; but they also are foiled. After this occurs a conversation in which Jesus discloses the leading principles of the religion which he was seeking to establish. Mark xii. 28–32 : “ And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all ? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is,

Hear, O Israel ; The Lord our God is one Lord : And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength : this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these." These were undoubtedly the doctrines of the Jewish law ; and they are admitted by the scribe to be so. Jesus does not pretend to add to, or to alter them ; what he does lay claim to is to proclaim, by divine authority, the forgiveness of sins on repentance, and a future life in the world to come, in which all the human race will receive happiness or misery according as their conduct has been good or bad in this world. The enemies of Jesus had now been baffled in their attempts to entrap him by his answers to their questions ; and from thenceforth ceased to pursue their purpose. Mark xii. 34 : " And no man after that durst ask him any question."

After the treatment which Jesus had received from the scribes and Pharisees, he might have been expected to set their authority aside. Like wise and good men in all ages, however, he makes a most important distinction between yielding obedience to those who are invested with lawful authority, and following their example when they do evil. Matt. xxiii. 2, 3 : " The scribes and the Pharisees" (he says) " sit in Moses' seat : All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do ; but do not after their works : for they say, and do not." In the midst of some very severe strictures by Jesus on the hypocrisy and other evil deeds of the scribes and Pharisees,

in which he censures their desire to be distinguished by titles of honour, he gives commandments to his apostles not to assume authority over their brethren. Matt. xxiii. 8-12: "But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters, for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Thus we see that Jesus holds out no hope of worldly power to his chosen followers; but, on the contrary, strongly inculcates lowliness and humility as distinguishing marks of his true disciples.

I intentionally pass over here the predictions of Jesus respecting the destruction of Jerusalem, which was shortly to take place. If these predictions were really prophecies, they were of a miraculous character; but we are now considering the narratives of the evangelists in no other view than as credible relations of ordinary facts.

In the latter part of the 25th chapter of Matthew's gospel, and there only, occurs a description of what shall take place at that awful day when the destinies of the human race in the world to come shall be fixed and declared. I shall cite the passage at length on account of its extreme importance. "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he

shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." It must be plain to every one who is acquainted with the discourses of Jesus, that the

virtues here enumerated as the subjects of reward at the last day, do not comprise the whole sum of Christian duty. No mention is made of the love of God, which Jesus had lately declared to be the first commandment. What is to be collected from this passage is, that the condition of the human race in the world to come will depend on their character here below. In the language usually applied to this subject, virtue will be rewarded, and vice punished. In more correct terms, God will of his goodness confer happiness in the world to come on those who have been obedient to his holy will, and will punish the transgressors of his law.

We have now arrived at the last day of the life of Jesus, beginning, according to the Jewish mode of computation, at sunset on the evening of Thursday; and, in order to form a just estimate of his character and views, we must fully consider his conversations with his disciples; his instructions to them, and his conduct throughout the trying scene, when, deserted by his followers, he had to contend alone with the unjust proceedings of iniquitous judges; to endure the insults of his adversaries, and their cruel scourging of his person; to be nailed alive upon the cross; to bear the agonies of a most cruel death, aggravated by the contumelious reproaches and contemptuous remarks of the bystanders. Under these circumstances there is no room for dissimulation; the world, with all its joys and sorrows, its hopes and fears, is vanishing away; nothing is to be gained by insincere professions, nothing to be lost by sincerity. Here then we may assuredly look for a genuine display of character; and we will now, with some minute-

ness, proceed with the narratives by the evangelists of the closing scene of the life of their Master.

The Jewish authorities had now resolved to seize Jesus in order to destroy him, but his popularity was at this time so great that they were afraid to apprehend him in the sight of the multitude; and they therefore determined to find the means of getting access to the place of his retirement; and there to seize him. For that purpose they engaged to give a sum of money to Judas Iscariot, one of his apostles, who undertook to deliver Jesus into their hands.

Jesus, having previously sent Peter and John to secure a room for him in which to eat the Passover, took his seat at table, with his apostles, in the evening for that purpose.

He now proceeds to eat the Passover with his disciples, and here occurs a memorable incident which shows that even his chosen disciples were actuated by worldly motives, and had formed entirely erroneous notions of the religion which their master was establishing. Notwithstanding his repeated exhortations to humility, we find them now striving for superiority. Luke xxii. 24-26: "And there was a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief as he that doth serve." This was followed by a remarkable act of humility on the part of Jesus in washing the feet of his disciples (John xiii. 5-11). He next points out that Judas Iscariot is the disciple who will deliver

him up to his enemies. He then institutes the Lord's Supper, and delivers the most interesting discourse contained in the 14th, 15th, 16th, and 17th chapters of the gospel of John. He assumes throughout this discourse to act by the authority of God, whom he uniformly styles the Father; he tells them that he is going to leave them; exhorts them not to be sorrowful; promises to send the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide them; and directs them to address their prayers to God in his name. He also foretells them that they will all desert him, and leave him alone; and also that they will be persecuted for his sake. On this occasion the disciples express their belief that their Master came from God.

Jesus now retires to a garden at Gethsemane, close to Jerusalem, taking with him the three disciples Peter, James, and John, whom he had already distinguished on former occasions. Having desired them to watch, he departed a little distance from them and earnestly prayed to God, under a deep and agonising anticipation of the sufferings which he expected to be called on to endure. While he is thus engaged in prayer, the apostles fall asleep. Jesus reproaches them for not watching with him as he had requested them to do, but he directly finds an excuse for them, Matt. xxvi. 41: "the spirit, indeed, is willing, but the flesh is weak." Immediately after this, Judas, with a band of men, sent by the Jewish authorities, comes to the garden for the purpose of taking Jesus into custody. It does not appear that any other than the three selected apostles were present in the garden at the time of the apprehension of Jesus by the officers; which perhaps accounts for some important circum-

stances which took place having been narrated by John only. The other disciples, however, were probably near enough to know what was done, and we are informed by Matthew and Mark that all the disciples forsook him and fled. At first, however, those who were with him, or at least Peter, were determined to attempt to prevent his being taken; and that apostle went so far as to cut off the ear of one of the servants of the High Priest; but he was immediately reproved by his Master, who commanded him to put up his sword. Jesus then surrendered himself quietly.

It will not be necessary for our present purpose to go at any length into an account of what took place on the examination of Jesus before the chief priests, the Sanhedrim, Herod and Pontius Pilate. A few things only must be noted. When interrogated by the High Priest, he distinctly owns himself to be the Messiah. Mark xiv. 61, 62: "Again the High Priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am; and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." He in effect says the same things, though not so distinctly, on his examination before the Sanhedrim. (See Luke xxii. 66-70.) What he says to Pilate afterwards is to the same effect; but he adds, that his kingdom is not of this world. (See John xviii. 33-37.) Pilate, though convinced of the innocence of Jesus, and desirous to release him, yields most iniquitously to the chief priests and the people; and, partly to gratify them, and partly, it should seem, from a fear of offending the Emperor, if he should fail to punish one who had

acknowledged himself to be the king of the Jews, although he had at the same time declared that his kingdom was not of this world, gave Jesus up, first to endure a cruel scourging, and afterwards to suffer the punishment of death by crucifixion.

That the hellish ingenuity of man should have invented so horrible a punishment as nailing a living being to a cross and suspending him till his frightful agonies were terminated by death, is a most lamentable proof of the wickedness of which human nature, when corrupted and depraved, is capable. In addition to the suffering of this unspeakably dreadful punishment, it was in the highest degree ignominious, as it was reserved for slaves and the greatest criminals. No Roman citizen was liable to be crucified. In writing of the crucifixion of Jesus I shall only advert to such circumstances as display his character.

It was customary for persons condemned to be crucified, to carry the cross, or, as some think, a part of it, to the place of execution; and the evangelist John informs us, that Jesus bare his cross. As, however, the other three evangelists agree in saying that the cross was laid upon a person of the name of Simon, it is probable that Jesus had been so far weakened by what had taken place as to be unable to sustain the weight of the cross; and that although it was laid on him, in the first instance, he was afterwards relieved of the burthen by Simon. This seems to be generally understood to have been the case. An affecting incident is told as follows, Luke xxiii. 27-31: "And there followed a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them said,

Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" The evangelist adds (ver. 34), that when they crucified him, he prayed to God, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." It does not appear that any of the apostles, except John, had so far repented of the base desertion of their Master as to attend on him at his crucifixion. The disciple whom Jesus loved (to use his own language) was there, as were also the mother of Jesus, and other women. John proceeds thus, xix. 25-27: "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." Matt. xxvii. 46: "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" This exclamation was probably made to call the attention of the bystanders to the 22nd Psalm, of which it is the first verse, and which Jesus must have understood to be prophetic of his sufferings. The closing event of his life is thus described by Luke, xxiii. 46: "And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father,

into thy hands I commend my spirit : and having said thus, he gave up the ghost."

Here let us pause to review the narrative of the life of Jesus. We have been introduced to a person totally dissimilar in character to any who had preceded, or to any who has followed him. The individuals who approach nearest to him are Socrates, the great moral teacher of Greece, and the Hebrew prophets ; but these are distinguished by broad and palpable differences. Much discussion has arisen respecting what is commonly called the demon of Socrates ; but it has led to no satisfactory conclusion as to the question, whether he considered himself in any, and, if so, in what degree, endowed with supernatural wisdom. In his conversations, which are fully reported by Plato and Xenophon, and though generally thought to be mixed by the first-named writer with speculations of his own, are apparently given with accuracy by Xenophon, we find him sometimes referring to his demon, and professing to be guided by him in the course of conduct which he pursues, yet assuming nothing of a didactic manner, but professing his own ignorance, he leads on those with whom he converses by a series of artful questions which ends in the exposure of their ignorance, and the inconsistencies of their opinions. The excellent moral precepts which follow appear to result from the foregoing conversations, and are not laid down by Socrates on the ground of any authority belonging to him. The Hebrew prophets, on the other hand, certainly claim to be inspired by God ; but they fall very short from arrogating the authority which we shall find uniformly assumed by Jesus.

I will now proceed to make some observations on the character and conduct of Jesus Christ. These will be considered under four heads: 1. The circumstances under which he came into the world, and lived in it; 2. The doctrines which he taught; 3. The authority which he assumed; 4. His personal character.

1. Jesus appeared to the world as the son of a carpenter at Nazareth in Galilee; and probably he himself followed that trade till he was about thirty years old. He is once in the gospel history called a carpenter, and as we have no account of the manner in which his life was passed, from the age of twelve till thirty, there seems no ground to doubt that the designation given to him was correct. I see no reason to believe that he possessed any advantage of education beyond other Jews of his station. One anecdote we have of his early life, which shows a remarkable intellectual superiority. At the age of twelve years we find him in the Temple at Jerusalem sitting with the doctors, and hearing and asking them questions. "And all (the evangelist adds) that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers."—Luke ii. 47. This incident, however, only shows that he displayed a superior intellect, which is a gift of nature, and is sometimes found in those who have enjoyed but little advantage of education; but it does not prove, or tend to prove, that he had an education superior to such of his countrymen as were brought up to mechanical employments. It does not then appear that at the period when he appeared as a public teacher, the previous circumstances of his life had given him any advantage beyond what belonged

to the station of an ordinary Jewish mechanic. The astonishment of the Jews was naturally excited by a person so circumstanced appearing among them as a teacher; and they naturally asked, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? Jesus here, as everywhere else, claims to have been instructed by Almighty God: "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me."—John vii. 15, 16. After all, it must be admitted, that as the evangelists are silent respecting the early life of Jesus, he may possibly, though it seems highly improbable, have obtained instruction to a much greater extent than the generality of his countrymen. In pursuing another branch of our inquiry, I will therefore assume that such may have been the case.

2. Let us now turn our attention to the doctrines which Jesus taught. Following John the Baptist, who had professed to be nothing more than his forerunner, we find Jesus beginning his ministry by preaching the forgiveness of sins to the penitent. He proceeds, without adhering to any systematic plan of instruction, to lay down the most exalted moral and religious precepts; often applying them to the particular state of things around him; and in many instances, in the enlivening and interesting form of parables. The leading principles of his teaching are, love of God, which he declares to be the first and great commandment; love of our neighbour as ourselves, to which he assigns the second place; personal purity, fortitude, and humility. All these precepts are inculcated in plain and simple language, generally speaking, and are enforced with deep and impressive seriousness, and often in a most affectionate manner.

Never before nor since has such a teacher of practical religion appeared in the world. It may be true that not a single precept is to be found in the evangelists to which a parallel may not be discovered in the Old Testament, or in the writings of the philosophers of Greece and Rome; though I much doubt if any of either the Jewish or the heathen writers have carried the doctrine of forgiveness of injuries so far as Jesus did. But supposing any of them to have done so, no where else shall we find all these exalted principles united in one complete system, and enforced by the highest sanctions. Jesus differs from other teachers in the authority which he assumes, which will be considered in the next division of our subject; and in teaching clearly the doctrine of a future state of retribution both to good and evil doers.

3. Jesus on all occasions professes to act by authority derived immediately from Almighty God. Again and again does he disclaim all power of his own, and declare that it is given by the Father. John v. 19: "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." John v. 30: "I can of mine own self do nothing." John vi. 38: "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." John vii. 16: "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me." John viii. 28, 29: "I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him." Many more texts to the same purpose will be found in the

gospel of St. John. But while thus acknowledging the supreme power of God, and claiming to act only as his delegate, he expresses himself, with respect to the power which had been communicated to him, in such language as the most highly gifted of the Hebrew prophets had never used. John x. 30 : "I and my Father are one." John x. 38 : "Though ye believe not me, believe the works ; that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him." In a subsequent chapter he prays to his Father that his disciples also may be exalted to unity with the Father. John xvii. 11 : "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are." John xvii. 18 : "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." John xvii. 21-23 : "That they all may be one ; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us : that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them ; that they may be one, even as we are one : I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one ; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."

4. We now come to the important subject of the character of Jesus. Assuming, as we have all along done, that the ordinary facts of the gospel history must be admitted to be true, it will follow that they truly set before us a character who stands alone in the history of the human race. We have already seen that the instructions of Jesus to his disciples consist of precepts of the most exalted piety and virtue.

Nothing is to be found in any of them which does not approve itself to the highest and purest moral sentiments and principles which we are capable of receiving or forming. If the Christian world were in practice what it is in profession ; if the human race were to regulate their conduct by the precepts of Jesus, the larger part of the ills which we have to endure in the world would vanish at once. Imperfect as the characters of even the best Christians are, if the world at large were to reach their standard, it would advance the well-being of the human race far beyond what has been the condition of man in the most prosperous and happy times with which history has made us acquainted ; and would bring to pass a state of order, virtue, and happiness of which we can scarcely form a conception. The spirit which flows from the precepts of the gospel is alike applicable to all times and to all circumstances. The human mind may be well employed in showing in what manner they can be best applied to the continually changing condition of different ages and nations ; but the gospel principles remain, and ever must remain the same. The love of God, and the love of man, personal purity, humility, and fortitude must always be the great leading principles of duty.

Such being the instructions of Jesus, we find his character in all respects worthy of his teaching. The narratives of the evangelists are given with great simplicity ; and there is not in any of them the least appearance of literary display. There is no apparent intention to draw a character ; nor is there any eulogium on the extraordinary person whose life they narrate. Never did any writings exhibit more

striking marks of authenticity than the four gospels. I confess it seems to me impossible that any candid person can entertain a doubt of their being authentic histories. How then do they describe the character of Jesus? From the moment that he commences his public ministry, his whole life is devoted to its duties. He “goes about doing good.” He instructs his hearers in all the duties of religion, and sets them an example of every virtue. He lives in a state of poverty; and has not where to lay his head. He accumulates no property; he has no home. Assuming Divine authority for his commission, he is content to live in the humblest station. While labouring incessantly for others, he does not solace himself with the domestic charities of life. He pursues no object of temporal ambition; but declares that his kingdom is not of this world. He lives on terms of familiarity with his apostles; and shows no resentment when they disbelieve his prediction of his sufferings. They are very slow in understanding the nature and purpose of his mission; and to the time of his death, and even after his death, as we shall see presently, they indulge in ambitious anticipations. These, however, are always reprov'd by Jesus; who clearly and repeatedly forewarns them, that persecution and suffering will be their lot in this world. These warnings, however, produce no conviction on their minds; and, to the last, they are disputing who is to be greatest among them in the kingdom which they expect their Master to set up. The other apostles do not appear to have been less worldly in their views and expectations than the traitor Judas, though they were perfectly guiltless of any participation in

his treacherous and wicked conduct in delivering up his Master to his enemies. Much has been written, and great diversity of opinion has existed respecting the object of Judas in betraying his Master. His subsequent conduct seems to show clearly that he did not anticipate the death of Jesus as the result of his treachery. The most common opinion seems to be that avarice was the passion which stimulated him to betray his Master ; but I can scarcely think that thirty pieces of silver could have held out a sufficient inducement to this act of treachery. It appears to me that Judas had, in common with all the other apostles, entertained an expectation of Jesus setting up a temporal kingdom in which he and they would be chosen to fill eminent stations ; and that his object in delivering up his Master to his enemies was that he might exert his miraculous powers for his deliverance, and immediately establish his kingdom. Be this, however, as it may, it is quite clear from the gospel history that none of the apostles had elevated their minds above worldly considerations ; and it is really astonishing to find how little they had profited by the unworldly and spiritual character of their Master's teaching. In him was no worldliness, no ambition ; but all his precepts are exalted, spiritual, divine. While asserting confidently, and with unparalleled dignity, the divinity of his mission, he sets before us an example of perfect humility. When he is called Good Master, he rejects the appellation, and declares that none is good but God. He affects no power or state, but lives on familiar terms with his disciples. Pure and holy as is his life, he avoids all unnecessary singularity ; adopts the ordinary modes of living of his

countrymen ; and partakes of their hospitality. When near the termination of his life, he performs that remarkable act of humility, washing his disciples' feet. He bears all the reproaches which he meets with from his countrymen, and the tortures which precede and accompany his death, with the greatest fortitude. He prays for those who are inflicting these cruelties upon him ; and when life is ebbing fast away, consigns his mother to the care of a beloved disciple. He sets himself in direct opposition to the scribes and Pharisees, who, at that period, assumed the character of teachers of religion, affected peculiar sanctity, were esteemed the strictest sect among the Jews, and were held in reverence by the people. Early in his ministry Jesus declares to his hearers, Matt. v. 20, " I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." In a subsequent discourse in the same gospel, Matt. xxiii. 3-33, he reprehends them in the severest terms, accusing them of hypocrisy and extortion, and threatening them with the vengeance of Heaven. Deep indeed must have been the sense of their hypocrisy and wickedness which would lead so gentle a spirit as that of Jesus to put forth such stern invectives, and such awful denunciations ; nor do I see how we can account for his so doing in any other way than by admitting that he really believed, what he always professed, that he acted by authority derived immediately from God. I can conceive no other cause adequate to produce such an effect. Let it never be forgotten, that Jesus stood quite alone in the world. We have already seen that his most

intimate associates, the apostles, misunderstood his instructions, and disbelieved his predictions. He enjoyed, it is true, for a time, great popularity with the people; but although it was no doubt to be imputed in part to the exalted character of his teaching, there is no reason to suppose that the multitude did not fully participate in the expectation of the apostles, that Jesus was destined to restore the kingdom to Israel. When, on his last visit to Jerusalem, he disappointed their expectations, the cry, "Hosanna to the son of David," was changed to, "Crucify him, crucify him;" and the populace of Jerusalem, from being his admirers and followers, became his bitterest enemies. At the last trying season of his life even his chosen apostles deserted him; and he stood alone and unsupported when he declared, before his iniquitous judges, that his kingdom was not of this world.

I will here review what has been said respecting the life and character of Jesus. We have seen that he belonged to a humble class among the Jews; that he lived in a poor condition all his days; that his life was devoted to religion and virtue, and affords no tittle of evidence that he was actuated by motives of ambition, or of any worldly advantage; that he taught the most pure and exalted morality, and that religion, in its most spiritual form, was the vivifying principle of his teaching; that he uniformly professed to act by the immediate authority of God; but that in his private demeanour he affected no other dignity than that which essentially belonged to his office, but lived on familiar terms with his apostles; bore kindly their infirmities; and condescended to the humble office,

on one occasion, of washing their feet ; that he submitted to the persecutions of his enemies with resignation, and bore with unshaken fortitude the cruelties which they inflicted upon him ; and which were terminated by a most painful and ignominious death.

It is now time to inquire who and what this most extraordinary person really was. I can perceive but three possible suppositions : he was either an impostor who attempted to deceive others, or an enthusiast who was himself deceived, or he was, what he always professed himself to be, the son of God. Surely the first supposition must be immediately rejected by every candid mind. The character of Jesus was in all respects holy and undefiled. In the histories of the four evangelists there is not a single instance of his transgressing any moral or religious law. His piety was most fervent and exalted ; his benevolence extended to all around him ; he displayed the utmost courage in reproving the vices of the scribes and Pharisees, the most powerful persons of his nation ; the fortitude with which he bore his sufferings was truly admirable ; and his humility, in the station which he filled, was unexampled.

The supposition that he was an enthusiast, and deceived himself, seems to me equally inadmissible. Nothing is more remarkable in the character of Jesus than the calmness of his mind under all circumstances. Once, and once only, and that for a short time, in the garden of Gethsemane, he was overcome by the apprehension of his approaching sufferings, but he soon recovered his habitual calm and collected state.

Though fully prepared to endure such sufferings as necessarily attended his mission, he encountered none unnecessarily ; and when he sent forth his disciples to instruct their hearers, and to perform acts of benevolence, though he warned them to expect persecution, he charged them not to expose themselves to it when it could be avoided. Matt. x. 23 : " But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another." There is nothing in the history of himself or of his immediate followers at all resembling what sometimes took place in subsequent ages, a desire in professing Christians to expose themselves to persecution and martyrdom ; thus glorifying themselves in their own eyes, and in those of the witnesses of their sufferings. Are we then, in spite of these indications of a calm, rational, and well-balanced mind in Jesus, to assume that he was merely an enthusiast ; or shall we find, on investigating the subject, that there is satisfactory proof that he was, what he professed to be, invested with authority by God himself, to preach repentance of sins ; to promise eternal life to the faithful servants of God ; and to institute a pure and holy religion which should endure to the end of the world ?

Here arises an important question : Is there anything incredible in the belief that God has revealed his will to man ? Those who support the affirmative answer to this question, have often put forth as an objection to any revelation of the Divine will, the extreme difficulty of deciding among the various religions in the world which have laid claim to a Divine origin, whether any, and which of them, has substantiated its claims. This, however, is no argument against the credibility of a revelation ; but relates

alone to the proof of it. The first matter to be settled in our inquiry is, whether revelation be absolutely incredible; the second, whether the Christian religion was established in the world under such circumstances as afford satisfactory proof of its Divine origin. The only argument for the incredibility of a revelation of the Divine will which appears to me to have any force at all, is that which is drawn from the limited extent to which it has prevailed. Of the antediluvian period of the world's history we know but little; and that little is derived from the Old Testament, the validity of which, of course, will not be admitted by the objector to revelation in any shape. He will take his stand therefore on its subsequent history. You must, he will say, admit that the globe had been inhabited by human beings for many centuries before Jesus appeared. You too, the believer in the truth of the Christian religion, tell us that there had been no revelation of the will of God previously to that period, except to the Israelites, a small nation, who had been selected from the mass of mankind as God's peculiar people; and that the religion revealed to them was neither intended nor fitted for the world at large. If, however, a revelation of the will of God be such an inestimable blessing as you represent it, it must be equally necessary for the whole human race as for Jews and Christians; yet the Jewish system was confined to one nation, and Christianity is to this day unknown to a great majority of the human race. How can that be from God which is thus partially promulgated and received? You say that there will be a future state; and that the Christian religion is given to pre-

pare men to enjoy its happiness ; but as all men are to live again in the future world, all must stand equally in need of this preparatory discipline ; how, then, can I believe that the knowledge of it, if it were from God, would be confined to a part, and that the smaller part, of his rational and moral creatures ? If the moral and rational faculties of those who are not acquainted with revealed truth be not sufficient to direct them in the path of duty, how are they to be judged ? Is there not gross injustice in judging them by a law with which they have never been made acquainted ; and if they are to be amenable only to the law of nature and reason, how is their condition to be considered inferior to that of those who have been enlightened by the revealed truth of God ?

It seems to me that these objections to the truth of the Christian revelation cannot be got rid of by those who hold that all who do not believe in Christ will be condemned and doomed to punishment in the world to come. Now it is obvious that those cannot believe in him who have never even heard of his existence ; which is the case with a large portion of the human race. These persons then, on this theory, will be condemned to future and, as a great majority of Christians profess to believe, to eternal punishment ; and have never been in a condition to escape from this unspeakably dreadful state. How those who hold this opinion can answer the arguments of the unbeliever which have been stated above, I feel no inclination to inquire ; because I am perfectly satisfied that the New Testament lends no support to the opinion in question. The only text directly to the point is in the last

chapter of the gospel by Mark. I shall lay no stress here on the well-known fact that many learned men have entertained serious doubts about the authenticity of the concluding verses of Mark's gospel. The text, with its context, is as follows. Mark, xvi. 15, 16: "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." The question as to the proper interpretation of the 16th verse is, whether it is to be held applicable to the whole human race, in all ages and nations of the world, or whether it is to be restricted to the hearers of those who are instructed to preach the gospel. The division of the Old and New Testaments into the small portions which we call verses, however convenient for reference, has led to the very serious and extensively prevailing error of interpreting each verse as an independent sentence, without regard to what precedes and what follows; and the mischief of this most erroneous mode of interpretation has been greatly enhanced by the circumstance that the divisions into verses—and the same may be truly said of the chapters—have been made with but little skill, and without such a reference to the context as would suggest a sound interpretation. Every one who has really studied the Scriptures must be aware that both chapters and verses are often divided in the wrong place, and that words are included in them which properly belong to a preceding or succeeding portion of the book of which they form part. If the New Testament, instead of its present arrangement, had been divided into paragraphs in such a manner as to bring the subject-matter clearly

before the reader by placing in each paragraph all that belonged to one particular branch of a subject, I cannot think that any one could have entertained a doubt about the meaning of the 16th verse. The 15th verse contains a command from Jesus to his disciples, to go and preach the gospel in the world; and but for the separation of what follows, by its being placed in another verse, there seems to be not the slightest reason to understand the 16th verse as applying to any other persons than those to whom the gospel was to be preached. To extend it to all mankind, including those who have never even heard the name of Jesus, is, to my mind, a most irrational interpretation.

I rest therefore fully satisfied, that the doctrine in question is not taught in the text which has been just examined. It may be said, however, that although this text should be given up, other passages may be produced from the epistles which prove that all will be condemned in the next world who have not believed in Jesus Christ. This, I think, is not the case; but I must reserve the observations I have to make on this subject till I come, in regular course, to consider the teachings of the apostles in the epistles.

Having then got rid of the objection founded on the supposed condemnation hereafter for their want of belief in Christ of those who had never heard his name, I proceed to the consideration whether there be really anything incredible in a Divine revelation of the will of God having been made to man.

I have endeavoured to show, in an early part of this work, that we have abundant reason to believe that the universe was created, and that it is governed

by one unspeakably wise and powerful Being ; and that he is perfectly benevolent. But although nothing appears in the world which we could pronounce, without the wildest presumption, to be inconsistent with the goodness of God, it is certainly true that we perceive much which cannot fail to puzzle us ; and which is very different from what, judging with the only faculties which we can apply to the subject, we should have expected to find in the works of a Being of infinite wisdom, uncontrollable power, and perfect goodness. No really benevolent mind can contemplate the vice and misery in the world without occasionally yielding to deep depression of spirit. We do not, and we cannot understand why so much physical and moral evil is allowed to exist under the superintending providence of the Supreme Being. The only cure for our dissatisfaction and despondency in viewing the scenes of vice and misery around us, is to be found in a just sense of the inadequacy of all our conceptions of the Deity. They are sufficient, if we be true to the best part of our nature, to form within us the profoundest piety, and a perfect reliance on him who made us ; and this is all that is really important. We cannot however know him to perfection : his deep things we cannot understand. To our feeble apprehensions it would seem that God would afford to every man the means of attaining the highest state of which his nature is capable. We might expect that God would treat all his human offspring alike ; that no advantage would be given to one above another : but we know that these things are not so. Perhaps it would be impossible to find any two human beings who have been placed in the world in circumstances

completely equal. To one is given sound health, great bodily strength, and superior intellectual capacity ; while another is infirm in mind and body. One is born in the lap of prosperity ; and another has to contend with the ills of adversity. One is kindly nurtured by intelligent, virtuous and religious parents ; while another is the offspring of those who live without God in the world. All these, however, must be admitted by those who believe in the existence of God to be the work of his hands ; and the circumstances in which they are placed are under his direction ; and cannot therefore be inconsistent with his perfections. I have the most confident belief that God is good unto every man ; that his tender mercies are over all his works : but it is quite certain that he confers different degrees of good on different individuals. This is a fact which none can deny ; and reflection on it leads to the question, whether the human mind can determine to what extent one class of men may be blessed with advantages above the rest of the human race consistently with the Divine attributes. The question, however, answers itself. It is plain that we can assign no limits to the Divine operations ; or pretend to say to what extent the infinitely wise, good and powerful God may prefer one creature or one class of creatures to another. If it should be objected, that although there may be no injustice to an individual in his being placed in an inferior situation to another, as to physical advantages, the case is different with respect to morals and religion, because our condition in the next world will depend on our conduct here ; the answer is, that all will be then judged according to the circumstances in

which they have been placed: to whom much has been given, from those much will be required, while less will be expected from those who have enjoyed fewer advantages. This is the doctrine of the New Testament, clearly expressed in several of the discourses of Jesus. Be the force of the objection what it may, it applies as much to natural as to revealed religion; and those who admit the former, notwithstanding the inequalities in the condition of different persons and classes, cannot consistently object to revealed religion, because it professes to give advantages to those who receive it, which are not granted to the rest of the world. This objection then being disposed of, I am not aware of any other argument to prove that a divine revelation is in itself incredible, and incapable of being proved by any evidence whatever.

The question then, whether a religion which professes to be a revelation from God, can make good its claim, must depend on the testimony which is produced in its favour. I will therefore now inquire what is the character of the evidence which we are justified in requiring in this case.

The appeal can only be made to our rational and our moral faculties. Reason affords us abundant ground to believe in the existence and the attributes of God; and our moral faculty teaches us to love, honour and adore his perfections; and to expect nothing from him but what is good, and tends to good. As the Deity is the source of all power, wisdom and goodness, we may properly consider the possession of these qualities in a superior degree to that which the natural faculties of man can reach, as indications and proofs, that he who possesses and displays them thereby esta-

blishes his claim to be the delegate of Heaven. I do not perceive that we possess faculties which will enable us to admit any other internal evidence of the truth of revealed religion.

Let us apply this principle to the proof of the truth of the Christian religion derived from the character and conduct of Jesus Christ. As to the benevolent object of his instructions, and his own pure and unblemished character, there is no room for doubt or hesitation. From the commencement to the close of his ministry, his whole life was a labour of love. It was spent in giving the most exalted lessons of piety and virtue; and in administering to the wants of those around him. We come then to the question, Did he, in these benevolent exertions, exercise a supernatural power? If we believe the authors of the four gospels, he did this on many occasions, by miraculously healing the sick, restoring the power of walking to the lame, hearing to the deaf, and sight to the blind, and, in three instances, life to the dead. Whether or not we have sufficient ground to command our assent to the relations of these miraculous facts will depend on the credit due to the writers as witnesses of the facts they narrate, or as having received accounts of them from others under such circumstances as entitle them to full credit for the truth of what they said. I see no reason to deny that which is established by the concurrent testimony of the early age of Christianity, that two of the evangelists were apostles of Jesus; and that the other two were companions and friends of apostles. Matthew and John then must have been personal witnesses of a great part of the facts which they

relate ; and John, according to his own account, was present at the crucifixion of Jesus ; and witnessed the concluding scene of his life. The credit due to the apostles in the narration of the miracles which they affirm to have been worked by their Master, will depend on their characters and conduct, of which we have not, in the narrative of the life of Jesus, sufficient information. Much further light will be derived from the book of the Acts of the Apostles, to which our attention will be next directed ; and also from the epistles, which will be considered in due course after the Acts.

Before I proceed, however, to consider whether the early teachers of the Christian religion have a just claim to be believed in their account of the miracles which they tell us were wrought by Jesus, it will be proper to say a few words on the professed objects of Christianity, and of the sanctions by which it is supported and enforced. The object of the preaching of Jesus Christ was to set up a pure and holy religion, which he directed to be taught to all the world ; the principles of which are applicable to all nations and all times ; and are admirably fitted to carry human nature to its best and highest state. Not a precept is to be found in the discourses of Jesus which does not evidently tend to the advancement of religion and virtue. There is nothing superfluous in the Christian morals, and nothing redundant. New states of things, new combinations of circumstances are continually arising among the various nations of the earth ; but Christianity is fitted for all circumstances, and for all states of society. Is not this a religion worthy of

God to give; and should it not be received by man with the profoundest gratitude?

I have said, in my remarks on Natural Religion, that it gives us no satisfactory information on two most important points, the efficacy of repentance, and a future state. Jesus authoritatively declares that sin shall be forgiven on repentance, that there will be a resurrection of the whole human race, and that their happiness or misery in the world to come will entirely depend on their characters and conduct here. Thus we have enlisted on the side of religion two of the most powerful passions of the human breast, hope and fear. These, however, are by no means put forward as the only, or the most prominent motives and principles of the religion of Jesus. By many Christian teachers they have been adopted as the only motives for good conduct; and a large class of moralists acknowledge no other principle of virtue but a regard to our own happiness. Such is not the teaching of Jesus Christ. It strongly urges, indeed, occasionally, the hope of reward and the fear of punishment as motives for the performance of Christian duty; but they never stand in the foremost rank. He does not tell his disciples that the hope of heaven and the fear of hell are the first and second commandments; nor does he make them commandments at all. He refers to higher and nobler principles than those which terminate in self. The love of God is his first commandment, and the love of our neighbour as ourselves the second. Of what value, then, it may be said, is the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments? Of the greatest, I answer, because it is applicable to

all ; and is especially calculated to be the first step in reclaiming sinful men from vice and wickedness. Human nature is prone to selfishness ; and is apt to be led to sin by violent and uncontrolled passions. Hope and fear are the most powerful antagonists of these evil tendencies. There can, I think, be no doubt that the fear of punishment in the world to come often operates powerfully to prevent the commission of the more heinous sins. Hope, and more particularly fear, are excellent teachers in the early period of a religious life ; but the true Christian will by degrees rise above their influence ; and disinterested love of God and love of man will in the end gain an ascendancy in his character ; and exert a power far beyond any regard to his own individual interest. Forgetfulness of self is an essential element of a truly great moral and religious character.

In order to form a judgment of the claim of Christianity to be from God, we must now direct our attention to its history immediately subsequent to the death of Jesus. That the Christian religion survived its founder ; that it spread rapidly in the world ; that its professors were obliged to endure persecution in its most dreadful forms, which they bore with unshaken fortitude ; that it was adopted by the emperor Constantine as the religion of the mighty Roman empire ; that it became that of the kingdoms and states which arose out of the ruins of the empire ; and that it is at the present day the professed religion of the most intelligent and civilized nations of the earth—these are facts beyond the reach of cavil and dispute. To account for these facts, then, putting

aside the question of Divine authority, cannot be a matter of indifference to any who take an interest in the history of the human race ; and the inquiry is made unspeakably more interesting when it includes the question, whether this religion can really substantiate the claim which it has always made to Divine authority. The book of Acts and the Epistles contain accounts of the promulgation of Christianity by the followers and disciples of Jesus Christ ; and of the early state of the Christian church. These writings have been received, and their authority has been acknowledged from a very early age ; and there is no other account of the early history of Christianity which holds any sort of competition with these writings. So far, then, as the common facts contained in them are concerned, I see not the slightest reason to reject their authority. Now, what are these common facts ? It appears from the gospels and the book of Acts, that the apostles and other followers of Jesus professed themselves to be witnesses of his resurrection from the dead ; to have had repeated interviews with him ; and to have received instructions from him to preach his religion to the world. That the resurrection of Jesus has been an article of faith in the Christian church from early ages ; and that amidst all the controversies which have divided and distracted the Church, it has been steadfastly held by all sects and parties, is perfectly well known. This doctrine, then, must either have been held from the first, or it originated at some particular period in the history of the Christian church. Let us for a moment consider the latter supposition, and assume that the

doctrine of the resurrection was taught, for the first time, at an early period, say in the second century. This assumption supposes that the Christian religion had been previously in existence, but that the belief in the resurrection of Christ had formed no part of it. It is easy to imagine the astonishment with which the announcement of this fact would be received by those who had never heard of it before; and I know of nothing in the history of human credulity which can induce me to believe that it could possibly have been received by any under such circumstances. How can it be supposed that men in their senses could have believed in a pretended fact which was said to have taken place at least a hundred years ago, and which had not been believed by their fathers, and others who lived near the time? The supposition is perfectly incredible. It may be added, that there is not the slightest trace in history of this change having taken place in the creed of professing Christians. I conclude, then, that the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ from the dead has been professed by Christians from the beginning; and there appears no probable, or indeed possible, way of accounting for it but by the testimony of those who had known him when living; and who bore their attestation to having seen and conversed with him after his resurrection. I can, then, see no reason to reject the accounts given in the gospels and the book of Acts of the assertions of the apostles and others of the followers of Jesus that they had seen him alive after his resurrection. Whether they ought to be believed will be considered hereafter.

Accounts of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead

are contained in all the four gospels ; but the details of the respective narratives vary materially. Whether the apparent discrepancies in these accounts can be reconciled seems to me of little importance. All agree in the great important facts that Christ actually rose from the dead, and had repeated interviews with those who were well acquainted with his person, among whom were the eleven apostles who had been his chosen companions. Supposing the four evangelists to differ irreconcilably in some of the minor circumstances of these transactions, it is only what is constantly occurring in courts of justice ; and is easily accounted for by the circumstance that the more important facts of any given event are always more accurately observed than things of smaller moment. This alone would satisfy every fair inquirer ; but this is by no means all which may be said of the case in question. None of the earlier scenes which are stated to have followed the resurrection took place in the presence of the apostles. The first transaction in which any of them were concerned was that of Peter and John going to the sepulchre after they had heard the account of the women who had previously been there. The visit of the two apostles to the sepulchre is fully narrated in the gospel of John, who was one of them ; and there is nothing inconsistent with it in the other gospels. Matthew and Mark do not mention this incident. Luke only says that Peter ran to the sepulchre, and looked in ; but he does not say that Peter went into the sepulchre, as John says he did, nor does he mention John at all. There is, however, no contradiction between the two evangelists. Luke narrates only part of the transaction,

while John (a party concerned) tells the whole. Now, it must be borne in mind that Luke was not an apostle, and that we have no evidence of his having been at any time in the life of Jesus one of his disciples. It is therefore not improbable that Luke, when he wrote his gospel, may not have been fully informed of what is not a material, or at least not an essential circumstance, in the evidence of the truth of the resurrection,—this visit of Peter and John to the sepulchre.

We come now to the material part of our inquiry, the fact that the apostles and others who had been companions of Jesus during his life, asserted that he had risen again; had appeared to them and conversed with them; and had given them instructions to proclaim his religion to the world. Here the question arises, Are they deserving of credit, or ought we to reject their testimony altogether? There are only three possible suppositions: either they were deceived themselves; or they attempted to deceive others; or what they asserted is true.

It is certainly remarkable that neither Matthew nor John mentions the ascension of Jesus into heaven, although that has always been a received doctrine in the Christian world. With respect to the gospel of Matthew, I find much in the last chapter which leads me to believe that it is an unfinished work. Whether the apostle was prevented by death from putting a finishing hand to it, or whatever else may have been the cause, the impression on reading the last chapter is to me quite irresistible that he could not have intended so to conclude his work. This indeed is only conjectural; and I cannot presume to say how the

minds of others may be affected by reading this chapter ; but the effect on my own is precisely as I have stated ; and I can come to no other conclusion. The only solution of the silence of John on this important subject is, that he had probably read the accounts of the ascension given by Luke in his gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles, and that he thought it sufficient without any additional testimony. Mark mentions the ascension in a single verse ; but many learned and able men have thought that the concluding paragraph of his gospel is not the work of the evangelist, but was added by some subsequent writer. The first two evangelists give very short accounts of the appearance of Jesus to his disciples. Luke's is fuller. In his gospel he mentions shortly the ascension of Jesus, and in the Acts he narrates more at large the circumstances which preceded and accompanied it. He also says that forty days elapsed between the resurrection and the ascension. St. John states several particulars which it will be important to consider.

Notwithstanding that Jesus had on several occasions predicted his resurrection from the dead, none of his disciples appear to have believed it. St. Mark tells us that when Mary Magdalene told the apostles that Jesus was alive, and had been seen of her, they believed her not. Luke says, when she and other women informed the apostles that they had seen Jesus risen from the dead, that their words seemed to them idle tales, and they believed them not. All the hopes of the disciples appeared to have been fixed on a temporal kingdom, and to have vanished away at the death of their Master. " We trusted," said the dis-

ciples at Emmaus, Luke xxiv. 21, "that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." Even after they are quite satisfied of the truth of the resurrection, and that the person with whom they are conversing is really no other than their Master, Jesus, they ask: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Acts i. 6. The apostle John is the first of them who is thought to have believed in the resurrection. John xx. 8: "Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw and believed." The meaning of the text, however, is very doubtful; and the next verse seems rather to indicate that what he believed was only that the body of Jesus had been taken away, as Mary Magdalene had informed him and Peter.

I will here make a few observations respecting the historical part of the New Testament. The gospels and the book of Acts must be considered to be either narratives of real facts, or to be fictitious stories fabricated to answer some particular purpose. Now the only purpose which, to my knowledge, has ever been suggested is, that the Christian religion, having by some means or other—of which none of those who embrace the strange hypothesis which I am going to examine give any satisfactory account,—been established in the world, the New Testament scriptures were written afterwards, for the purpose of furnishing a record of a supernatural origin of Christianity. I have already endeavoured to show that the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead must have been believed by Christians from the very commencement of their religion. Supposing then this article of faith to have been supported merely by tradition till the

Christian religion had made a considerable advance in the world, it seems highly improbable that a fictitious narrative should be invented and introduced in proof of the reality of this most important fact. For what purpose could such a transaction have taken place? In all ages the inquirers into the foundation of their faith are but few; the great mass of the people in all countries, and at all times, are willing to follow their fathers; and even in the present enlightened age it is very generally made a matter of reproach to a man that he has departed from the church or sect in which he was brought up. The teachers of the Christian religion could at no time have been tempted to commit a barefaced and impudent forgery for the purpose of attaching their followers to the doctrines which they taught. If such an attempt were made, it must have been with reference to the inquiring few; but how could this be done with any hope of success? Could men of inquiring minds be possibly induced to receive as authentic, narratives of facts represented to have taken place a century or two centuries ago, and of a most extraordinary and even miraculous character? Surely the success of such an imposture would be impossible. But if the attempt had been made, it must have been in a very different manner. The gospels are four independent histories, of which the first, second, and third run parallel to a great extent, while a large part of the fourth consists of narrations and discourses which are not contained in the other gospels; besides which, the language of the fourth gospel widely differs from that of the others, and contains discourses of Jesus expressed in

strong figurative language, very hard to be understood. Even in the three synoptical gospels (as they are often called) there are considerable differences and apparent inconsistencies. Matthew and Luke give accounts of the birth and infancy of Jesus, but they vary greatly in their circumstances. These variations do not amount to contradictions; but still they are very remarkable. Many of the narratives by the different evangelists cannot in all particulars be reconciled. The language, too, in which the discourses of Jesus are delivered greatly differs in the synoptical gospels; and (as has been already said) in those contained in the fourth gospel we find a style distinguished widely from anything in the other gospels. It is very difficult, if not actually impossible, to reconcile all the accounts of the crucifixion and of the resurrection. It is remarkable that no two of the evangelists agree in the precise language of the inscription which was placed on the cross of Christ. Now, it is easy to understand how these apparent discrepancies arose, if we consider the four gospels as independent histories, written by four individuals. All agree in the leading and important acts and discourses of Jesus; but they frequently differ on matters of inferior importance, which were from their nature less likely to leave an accurate impression on their memories. This is perfectly consistent with our ordinary experience of human testimony, and does not detract in the least degree from the general credibility of the narratives. These discrepancies, however, have always afforded an occasion for cavil and dispute to the enemies of Christianity. Supposing then the gospels to have been formed in a sub-

sequent age, for the purpose of supporting an existing form of religion, it appears perfectly incredible that the apparent discrepancies which have been mentioned above should have found a place in them. I can conceive no plausible reason why there should, under the circumstances supposed, have been more than one narrative. To multiply the forgery to four gospels would have been quite unnecessary; and would have increased the chances of its detection. But admitting that, for some reason unknown to us, the introducers of these fictitious narratives had thought proper to resort to a plurality of numbers, it is highly improbable that they would have permitted anything to appear in one gospel apparently inconsistent with the others. They must indeed have been wretched bunglers at their work to have done this.

Supposing that the gospels were written at a time considerably subsequent to the period of which they profess to give an account, and for the express purpose of sustaining and strengthening the Christian religion, it is in the highest degree probable that they would have given the most favourable account of the characters and conduct of the followers of Jesus, who first proclaimed his religion to the world; and that they would have carefully avoided relating anything which could dishonour them. How very different is the gospel history from this! The characters of the apostles appear in a much less favourable light in the gospels than any one could have expected. They are all very slow to learn; and are so far from understanding and feeling the spiritual and unworldly character of their Master's teaching, that to the last they are expecting him to set up a worldly kingdom.

In the day of his persecution they all forsake him. Even the three apostles who are most distinguished by his favour appear, on some occasions, in an unfavourable light. They cannot watch with him in the hour of his agony, though he had requested them to do so. The sons of Zebedee on one occasion request permission to call down fire from heaven to consume those who had offended them; and, near the end of the life of Jesus, they are desirous of places above the other apostles in the kingdom which they expect him to set up. Peter, who had always taken the leading part among the apostles, denies all knowledge of his Master when he is delivered up to his enemies, and accompanies his denial with curses and oaths. Could any person of common sense have introduced statements so derogatory to the first preachers of Christianity into a work expressly intended to advance its interests in the world? Surely this is impossible. Enough I trust has been said against an hypothesis most improbable in itself; gratuitously assumed; and unsupported by any well-authenticated historical fact.

And now a difficulty may be thought to arise as to the authors of the gospels. How, it may be asked, do we know that the four gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; and that the first and last of the evangelists were apostles of Jesus? We certainly cannot pretend that we have absolute certainty in this matter; but we have all the evidence which can be reasonably expected in the case, that the gospels were written by those whose names they bear, and that they sustained the characters ascribed to them, two being apostles, and the other two friends

and followers of apostles. The concurrent testimony of the early ages of Christianity establishes this. The heathens, who regarded the Christian religion as a superstition, and its claims to Divine authority to be unfounded, of course, would not trouble themselves about the authors of the gospels; and it is therefore from Christian writers only that we can expect to get information on this subject. Many learned men have shown that the gospels and the other books of the New Testament were referred to in very early times; and that with the exception of a few of the epistles and the Revelation they were always ascribed to the authors whose names they bear. Those who require full and complete information on this subject may find the arguments learnedly and candidly stated in Lardner's excellent work on the Credibility of the Gospel History. The evidence produced by him, I think, satisfactorily proves that the gospels were written by the evangelists whose names they bear. But even supposing any doubt should remain as to those individuals being the real authors, it appears, from the reasons stated above, that they were written in very early times when the ordinary facts stated in them were well known.

I will here refer to a heathen writer to prove that Jesus Christ was the author of the Christian religion. "They" (the Christians), says Tacitus, "had their name from Christus, who, in the reign of Tiberius, was put to death as a criminal by the procurator Pontius Pilatus*." It is true that Tacitus says that the Christians were hated for their crimes, and that

* *Auctor nominis ejus, Christus, Tiberio imperitante, per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio adfectus erat.*—Annal. xv. 44.

he calls their religion a pernicious superstition; but his ill opinion of them cannot in the slightest degree derogate from the weight of his testimony as to the origin of their religion. Seeing then that Jesus Christ is referred to by Tacitus who lived in the first century, and that all the Christian writers whose works are now in existence refer their religion to the same origin, I do not see how any fair and reasonable person can deny this to be the fact, unless he come prepared with proofs to the contrary; and is in a condition to point out and prove some other commencement of it. No plausible attempt of this kind has, to my knowledge, been made.

Believing therefore that no rational doubt can be entertained that Jesus Christ was the founder of the religion which for more than eighteen centuries has borne his name; having also shown that the gospels must have been written at no great distance of time after the events which they profess to record occurred; that they have been uniformly attributed to the authors whose names they bear; and that the internal evidence, derived from their contents, of the authenticity of the common facts which they relate is most strong and convincing, I feel myself fully warranted in holding them to be authentic narratives.

Before we proceed to the consideration of the claims of Christianity to be a Divine revelation, let us look back on the ground which we have passed over, and recapitulate the ordinary facts of the gospel history. We have seen that Jesus, following the steps of his precursor John the Baptist, preached repentance from sin as a qualification for forgiveness; that he announced a future state in which all mankind would be rewarded

or punished according to their conduct in this world ; that he acknowledged on all occasions, that he had no power of himself, but that he always acted under the authority of God, whose Son he professed himself to be ; that he taught the love of God to be the first, and the love of our neighbour as ourselves the second commandment ; that he uniformly inculcated purity of life and humility, and forewarned his disciples that they would be exposed to persecution in the promulgation of his religion ; that he professed to work miracles by healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and, on three occasions, by restoring life to the dead ; that he prophesied that he should come to a violent death, and should be raised from the grave and restored to life on the third day ; that he also prophesied that the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed within the lifetime of some of those who heard him ; that the kingdom which he professed himself authorised by the Almighty to set up was entirely of a spiritual character, and was declared by himself not to be of this world ; but that nevertheless his disciples could never be brought to comprehend the spiritual purport of the teaching of their Master, but to the last were looking for temporal distinction in a worldly kingdom ; and to these we must add, that his own character was pious and virtuous in the highest degree, undegraded by a single evil action, and affording the brightest example of moral excellence.

Embracing then the gospels as setting forth the common facts in the life of Jesus, it remains to consider whether his claim to supernatural authority is supported by such evidence as should command our assent.

It will be proper, before I examine the claims of Christianity to a miraculous origin, to make a few remarks respecting miracles in general. Hume, in his celebrated essay, endeavours to show that miracles are absolutely incapable of being proved; and that they never have been, and never can be supported by arguments strong enough to induce rational persons to believe that the order of nature has ever in any instance been suspended by a miracle. Hume's arguments have, I think, been satisfactorily confuted more than once; but it will be unnecessary to attempt a confutation here, because the question I am going to enter upon may be discussed on the grounds stated by Hume himself as decisive on the subject. It will be only requisite to correct an inaccuracy of language in what he calls a general maxim; and to add a few words of comment on the latter part of it.

The maxim is, "that no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish: and even in that case there is a mutual destruction of arguments, and the superior only gives us an assurance suitable to that degree of force, which remains after deducting the inferior." There is an inaccuracy in the language of the first branch of this maxim, for as by a miracle we mean a deviation from the laws of nature, it is evident that one event cannot be more *miraculous* than another. Substituting the words "more incredible" for "more miraculous," I see no objection to reasoning the case on the ground of the maxim. The latter part is quite unnecessary; and seems to have been inserted for the purpose of dis-

crediting miracles, however strong the evidence by which they are supported. No doubt, in all cases of conflicting arguments, the strength of those which produce conviction can be no other but their excess of force above those which are opposed to them. This may be so small as to leave only a slight probability on the side of the preponderating arguments, or so large as to exclude any degree of doubt of their truth. The inquiry on which I am now about to enter is, whether or not we have satisfactory evidence of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead? This, in the language of Hume's maxim, may be thus expressed: Is it more incredible that those who attested the fact, that Jesus had risen from the dead, should have, in the circumstances in which they were placed, asserted a falsehood, than that Jesus should really have been raised from the dead? Those who find themselves bound to answer this question in the affirmative must, on Hume's principle, admit the reality of the resurrection of Jesus; and the firmness of their faith in it will depend on the degree of force which they think belongs to the arguments in its favour beyond that of its presumed incredibility.

I have selected the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the subject of inquiry, because whoever receives it as a fact acknowledges the truth of the Christian religion; which is, on the other hand, rejected by all who disbelieve it. I am not acquainted with a single exception to this statement; nor is it easy to imagine a mind so strangely constituted as to admit a miraculous resurrection of Christ from the tomb; and nevertheless to deny the Divine authority of his

religion. The question then to be decided is this : Have we sufficient evidence to believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross, and was restored to life on the third day ? The resurrection is the great leading fact of Christianity. " If," says St. Paul, " Christ be not raised, your faith is vain."

Before I enter on the inquiry as to the truth of the resurrection it will be proper to state what kind of evidence can reasonably be expected; and therefore ought to be required, of the fact in question. We have already seen that there is abundant reason to believe that the universe was formed and is sustained by a Being of uncontrolled power and of perfect wisdom and goodness. Everything therefore which comes from him we must expect to bear marks of these perfections ; and if anything should be found in a professed revelation clearly and undeniably inconsistent with the power, wisdom, or goodness of God, a strong argument would arise that the claim to Divine authority could not be supported. If, on the other hand, the supposed revelation should be apparently consistent with the Divine attributes ; if it should be a message of benignity and mercy, promising forgiveness to repentant sinners, containing the purest and sublimest precepts of religion and virtue ; calculated, if received and acted upon, to advance the virtue and happiness of the human race in this world, and holding out an assured hope to those who receive it and regulate their lives by its precepts, of eternal felicity in the world to come, it would have the strongest claim to serious consideration, and to a candid examination of its assertion of Divine authority.

And here some observations may be introduced respecting the supposed incredibility of miracles. The human race, it may well be said, have the firmest confidence in the regularity and permanency of the laws of nature. All believe that the sun will continue from day to day to gladden the face of the earth, that a piece of lead thrown into water will sink, and that dry wood placed on fire will be burned. The regularity of the laws of nature is attested by the experience of all living, and by the historical and traditional accounts of all former ages. With respect to human testimony the case is widely different. We know that falsehood has always prevailed, and does still prevail in the world to a very great extent; how then can we believe in miracles, in other words that the laws of nature have been suspended, when our only reason for doing so must be derived from human testimony, which our experience and that of mankind in all ages have proved to be often unworthy of credit? Now, this objection in truth only brings us back to Hume's maxim, and I have already agreed with him, that testimony to miraculous facts is not to be admitted, unless it can be shown to have been given under such circumstances as make it more incredible that it should be false than that the miracle which it is produced to prove should be true. But there is, I suspect, a latent objection in the minds of those who consider miracles incapable of proof by any means whatever, though I do not know that it has been distinctly put forward, that a belief in miracles strongly tends to diminish our confidence in the regularity and permanence of the laws of nature. This appears to me to be implied in much of what

has been written on the subject of miracles. I cannot, however, perceive that it has any rational foundation. With what pretence can it be said that those who believe in miracles have less confidence in the general regularity of the operations of the laws of nature than others? Those who admit the truth of all the miracles recorded in the legends of the saints, although they probably have been more disposed than others to believe in any miraculous tales which have fallen in their way, have not, to my knowledge, expected with less confidence than others that the sun will pursue its course from day to day, that seedtime and harvest will succeed each other at the usual periods, that fire will continue to burn, and water to drown. The belief in miracles therefore has apparently no tendency to lessen in the slightest degree our confidence in the permanency and general regularity of the laws of nature. These things then being premised, we come to the question, on what ground do we hold miracles to be antecedently incredible? The answer does not lie much beneath the surface. The laws of nature are fitted to the wants of man and of other sentient beings, and produce a regular succession of events by which the lives of men and animals are in a great degree regulated. Any deviation from those laws which did not tend to produce some good which would not have resulted from their operation would be useless, and therefore we should reasonably deem it incredible. But supposing a miracle should tend to produce some beneficial effect which would not have taken place by the operation of the ordinary laws of nature, I know of no reason derived from the notions which we are able to form of the ways of the

great Creator, which can authorise us to pronounce such a miracle incredible.

There is a passage in Hume's 'Essay on Miracles,' which, though put in a plausible form, appears on examination to have no weight whatever in support of the object for which it was written. "Upon the whole, then," he says, "it appears that no testimony for any kind of miracle has ever amounted to a probability, much less to a proof; and that, even supposing that it amounted to a proof, it would be opposed by another proof; derived from the very nature of the fact which it would endeavour to establish. It is experience only which gives authority to human testimony; and it is the same experience which assures us of the laws of nature. When, therefore, these two kinds of experience are contrary, we have nothing to do but subtract the one from the other, and embrace an opinion, either on one side or the other, with that assurance which arises from the remainder. But according to the principle here explained, this subtraction with regard to all popular religions, amounts to an entire annihilation; and therefore we may establish it as a maxim, that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any such system of religion."

As experience and testimony are put in opposition in this passage, and as the force of its reasoning entirely rests on the superior weight of the former to the latter, we will now consider what this experience really is. At the time when the 'Essay on Miracles' was published, Hume was about 36 years old. Does he mean to say that his confidence in the permanence and

regularity of the laws of nature was derived from his individual experience in the few years in which he had lived? This would indeed have been drawing a very large conclusion from extremely limited premises. The author, however, was far too acute and able a reasoner to fall into such an error. In a former part of the essay he thus expresses himself:—"A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established those laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined." It is obvious that the force of this argument turns entirely on the meaning which is assigned to the word experience. If we are to understand by it the experience of the thirty-six years of Hume's life, the argument has no force whatever. This is easily shown. It is a supposable case undoubtedly that changes may have taken place in the general laws of nature. Supposing, then, we had been informed by historians of former times, that the course of the sun and the tides of the sea had, in distant ages, been different from those which existed in the eighteenth century, a man would scarcely have been thought in his sober senses who should assert that the experience of the six-and-thirty years of Hume's life was sufficient to establish the permanence of the laws of nature against this conflicting testimony of the old historians of former ages. Surely no rational doubt can be entertained that the word experience, in the passage in question, means the experience of all times concerning which we have any authentic information; and what does this amount to but human testimony? We believe in the regularity and permanency of the

laws of nature, because they have been permanent and regular within our own very limited experience ; and because the credible chronicles of former periods of the world's history have in general agreed in giving accounts of physical facts perfectly consistent with our own experience. The experience then on which this acute philosopher founds his argument is, for the most part, drawn from human testimony ; and the question whether credit should be given to assertions of a deviation from the laws of nature, will depend in every case on the degree of weight to which the testimony which supports it is, under the circumstances in which it is given, entitled. In truth, the experience on which Hume lays so much stress, does not exist to anything like the extent which he assumes. So far from all history bearing testimony to an undeviating regularity in the succession of natural phænomena, the histories of Greece and Rome, and of all other ancient nations, abound in prodigies and deviations, in various forms, from the ordinary course of nature ; and miraculous events are continually recorded in the histories of the middle ages, and not unfrequently in the pages of modern historians. Are we then to assent to these miraculous narrations on the ground of their frequency and of the testimony by which they are supported ? By no means ; but the reason of our rejection of the greater part of them is not their inconsistency with an undeviating regularity in the laws of nature, which has never been proved, and apparently never can be proved ; but because the testimony in favour of the general regularity of those laws is liable to no suspicion of falsehood, while strong suspicion may be reasonably entertained as to the

truth of miraculous facts for the reasons to be now given. In the former case there is no advantage to be gained by falsehood, in the latter there may be much. I cannot conceive any motive which could induce historians and other authors, in different ages and countries, to agree in giving false accounts of the periods of the rising and setting of the sun and moon, the succession of the seasons, the course of human life, the property of fire to burn, and of water to quench. It is quite inconceivable that numbers of people, at different times and places, should concur, without any intelligible motive, in disseminating falsehoods. With respect to supposed miraculous events, the case is widely different. The love of power affords a strong stimulus to human action, and the desire to be thought superior to others acts perhaps with equal force. The man who can work a miracle excels others in power, and will attain a reputation among those who believe in the miracle beyond other men. These are distinctions attaching to all pretences to the possession of miraculous powers; but these are by no means the only, or even the strongest motives which may lead to the assumption of these powers. Those who have pretended to possess them have generally been either founders of some new religion, or introducers of some important changes in that which was established, or persons who held, or aspired to hold, important offices in their respective churches. Such persons have an obvious interest in giving strength to the authority which they enjoy, and in advancing and increasing their influence over the minds of their followers; which ends would evidently be answered by the belief of their possessing miraculous powers. But this is by no

means all. The priesthood has been usually closely connected with the civil authority of their respective countries. Often the same persons have wielded both civil and ecclesiastical power; and where that has not been the case, the ecclesiastical and the civil authority have given mutual aid and support to each other. Thus the natural desire of power and distinction may be reasonably presumed to have stimulated individuals to pretend to possess miraculous power, and to delude the world by pretended working of miracles, whenever the circumstances of the age in which they lived, and the position in which they were placed, afforded a probable chance of success in their attempts. Credulity largely prevails among men, particularly in the ignorant and ill-informed; and pretences to supernatural power, when skilfully conducted, and claimed with unhesitating confidence, will often, in a rude and credulous age, be attended with success. The conclusion to be drawn from history is, that a disposition to believe in supernatural events bears an inverse proportion to the intelligence of the age in which they are alleged to have taken place, and a direct proportion to the tendency of the age to superstition. I see not the slightest objection to a passage from Bacon, which Hume considers confirmatory of his argument. "Above all," says Bacon, "every relation must be considered as suspicious which depends in any degree upon religion, as the prodigies of Livy."

Returning then to the question of the assumed incredibility of miracles, I see nothing to warrant the conclusion, that it is incredible that the Deity has at any time, under any circumstances, and for any purpose, caused a deviation from the ordinary laws

of nature. If any one should say that the laws of nature are absolutely in themselves unalterable, so that even the Almighty cannot change them, I must demand of him to prove this; as no proof of it, or, to my knowledge, plausible argument for it, has been yet produced. Those who believe that those laws are the appointment of God, which I have endeavoured to show in the early part of this work is the only rational belief, can have no difficulty in admitting that he has power to suspend or alter them. Are we then in a condition to assert, that having the power, he never has had, and never can have the will to do so? Surely it would be folly and presumption in the highest degree for weak, shortsighted man to say this of his Creator. I do not see then that we can positively assume that there is any incredibility in a deviation from the laws of nature, such deviation having been calculated to produce beneficial effects which would not have occurred if they had constantly been in force without such deviation.

But although we should admit that there is nothing incredible in such a miracle as this, the evidence of its having taken place ought to be sifted with great care, and a reasonable suspicion may well be entertained that some deception has been practised. The grounds of this suspicion have been enumerated already. We will now consider what sort of evidence we may reasonably require to prove a miracle:—1, we must be satisfied that the witnesses could not be deceived; 2, that they were persons of honest character who did not intend to deceive others; which can only be proved by their being placed in such cir-

cumstances as leave no reason for believing that they were induced to give false testimony by a regard to their own interest, or by the influence of prejudice or passion; 3, that if there are several witnesses, they should all agree in the main fact of the miracle. We have already seen that differences respecting immaterial circumstances connected with the miracle, but not essentially belonging to it, would not tend to invalidate their testimony. This will be easily understood by all who have been in the habit of attending courts of criminal justice, where, in the proof of the most serious crimes, witnesses frequently differ as to immaterial facts, such as the dress of the person present, the exact time in which the event took place, &c. No sensible jury attaches any importance to discrepancies of this sort, for the plain reason, that these are facts, immaterial and, on that account, not likely to have been observed with close attention.

I will add here that great strength will be given to the evidence if the witnesses were previously strongly indisposed to believe the fact in question; and if they were very slowly brought to the conviction that a miraculous event had actually occurred.

In estimating the weight of the evidence produced to prove a miracle, due regard must be paid to the circumstances under which it is said to have taken place. We are always justified in demanding the best evidence which can be produced of the event in question. If we have an opportunity of personally witnessing the supposed miraculous fact, we ought to do so, because the evidence of our own senses must have greater weight than the testimony of others. If the miracle is said to have taken place in a distant

age and country, we can of course have nothing beyond historical testimony. With respect then to the miraculous resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the question is, have we or have we not sufficient evidence of its truth?

The Christian religion must have had a beginning. All the information from the writings of Christians and heathens which we possess concurs in showing that it had its origin in Palestine in the reign of the emperor Tiberius; that its original promulgator was Jesus Christ; and that after his death it was taught by his followers. That Jesus was crucified, and that he was miraculously raised from the dead, has been the belief of Christians in all ages of which we have any written account; and there is not a tittle of evidence tending to show that this was not an article of the Christian creed from the very beginning of the religion. We must, then, unless we choose to assume a fact without any evidence, believe that the first teachers of Christianity embraced and inculcated this belief. We have five narratives which profess to give accounts of the resurrection of Jesus, and of the subsequent conduct and teachings of his disciples. There are no writings in existence inconsistent with these histories; and if we reject them we are left without any information respecting the origin of Christianity. Considered as histories of ordinary facts, they are quite as much entitled to be received as authentic as any other ancient historical writings. I shall therefore continue to treat the gospels and the book of Acts as authentic narratives, as I have already done as to the accounts of the life of Jesus contained in the four gospels. The question for our serious con-

sideration will be, whether the common facts contained in these books afford satisfactory evidence of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

I will now proceed to state these common facts, claiming for the gospels and the Acts of the Apostles the same degree of credit as is usually given to historical narrations written at or near the time when the events occurred. I shall not greatly trouble myself with the question whether there may not be found in these histories inaccuracies and inconsistencies which prove that they cannot be, in every minute particular, correct accounts, because in the view which I take of the subject, such an inquiry is not at all necessary. It must indeed be thought essential by those who hold what is usually called the plenary inspiration of the whole of the Old and New Testament, that is, that every word was inspired by God ; but I can discover no rational foundation for that doctrine. I shall treat them as credible histories of common facts ; and examine their contents in no other way than that which I should pursue with respect to any other historians.

All the evangelists relate the death and burial of Jesus ; but the following passage, Matt. xxvii. 62-66, will require some remark :—" Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead : so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a

watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch." In connexion with this passage, I will now cite what immediately follows the account given by Matthew of the resurrection, xxviii. 11-15: "Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, his disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day." From the first of these passages it appears that all due precaution was taken to prevent the body of Jesus being taken from the sepulchre by his disciples, a watch being set, and the sepulchre being sealed. In the beginning of the next chapter Matthew says that an angel descended from heaven and rolled away the stone from the door of the sepulchre; and that for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. When, therefore, in the second passage cited above, the evangelist says that the watch showed to the priests the things that were done, I do not see what other meaning can be given to his words, but that they told the priests of the descent of the angel, and the rolling away of the stone from the sepulchre. The reader will, however, bear in mind that I am at present only assuming that the common facts of the

narratives are true, leaving the question of their miraculous character to be considered hereafter. The story told by the watch then consists of the assertion of the body being missing, and the supposition that the disciples had taken it away. They stole him away while we slept, say the soldiers; and as they could not have known what was done while they were asleep, their account of its having been taken away must have been merely conjectural. If the fact of Jesus having been miraculously raised from the dead can be established by satisfactory evidence, there is nothing in the story of the soldiers to contradict it.

In investigating the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, I shall confine myself to the testimony of the eleven apostles, who always professed themselves, as we shall presently see, to be the chosen witnesses of that event. All the evangelists, however, agree in the statement that the first appearance of Jesus after his resurrection was not to his apostles, but to Mary Magdalene. This is positively asserted by Mark, and Matthew mentions his appearing to her and the other Mary, apparently at a subsequent period, but before he was seen by any of the apostles. Mark says that when Mary Magdalene told the apostles that Jesus was alive, they believed her not; and Luke says that, when she and other women told them that they had seen Jesus alive, their words appeared to them idle tales, and they believed them not. It does not appear that any of the apostles professed to believe the resurrection of Jesus till they had actually seen, or pretended to have seen, him. A passage in the gospel of John may

seem to contradict this, but will not, I think, on examination be found to do so. The account given by that evangelist of the events following the resurrection is much fuller than any in the other gospels, and contains an important incident in which he was a party concerned. It is remarkable that he mentions Mary Magdalene only, and says nothing of the women who are said by the other evangelists to have accompanied her. According to the narrative of John, Mary Magdalene, having gone to the sepulchre and found that the body was not there, ran to Peter and John and told them of the fact; they then ran together to the sepulchre, but John arriving first looked into it, but did not enter it; Peter then arrived at the sepulchre, and went into it, and was followed by John. The 8th and 9th verses of the 20th chapter run thus: "Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again." Now the question is, what John believed. Some suppose the text to mean that he believed that Jesus had risen from the dead, but this seems to me a wrong interpretation. When Mary Magdalene went to Peter and John, she said, "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him." It is plain, therefore, that she had no thought of Jesus having been raised from the dead, but that her concern arose from her not being able to find the body, which, as appears from Mark and Luke, she and the other women had brought spices to anoint. The apparent object of Peter and John, in their visit to the sepulchre, was to ascertain the truth of Mary's statement.

John became satisfied of this by going into the sepulchre, and finding the linen grave-clothes lying there, but the body gone. Leaving the 8th verse to itself, I see no reason to doubt that what John believed was, that the body of Jesus had been taken away as Mary had asserted ; and this interpretation seems to be irresistibly confirmed by the 9th verse, and the accounts of Mark and Luke. The 9th verse says, “ For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.” If John had at this time believed in the resurrection of Jesus, he could not have failed to call to mind his distinct and repeated prediction of that great event, nor of applying to it any part of the Scripture which can be justly considered to predict it. It is also clear from Mark and Luke that the disciples disbelieved the accounts of the women when they professed actually to have seen Jesus ; and that John was one of them, appears from Luke, who says, that the women told their story to the eleven, meaning of course the eleven apostles. If then we admit the true interpretation of the 8th verse to be that John believed in the resurrection, we must conclude that he inferred it from the absence of the body from the sepulchre, though no one at that time pretended to have seen Jesus ; and yet that shortly afterwards, when the women professed to have seen Jesus, John, in common with the other apostles, disbelieved them. It seems scarcely necessary to say that this is incredible.

I will now examine the proofs of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead which are afforded by the testimony of his apostles. We have already seen that during his lifetime they gave no credence to his

repeated predictions of his death and resurrection, and also that they disbelieved the assertions of the women who said that they had seen him alive after his crucifixion. Our principal sources of information in this inquiry will be the gospels of Luke and John, and the Acts of the Apostles. But little is to be gathered from Matthew and Mark. After much consideration of the subject, I have come to the conclusion that, from some accidental circumstance of which we can give no account, a considerable portion of the last chapter of the first gospel has been lost. The narratives in the gospel of Matthew are, in general, given with remarkable conciseness, but it seems to me highly improbable that he or any other author could have left an account of facts in so unfinished a state as the 28th chapter of his gospel. The 2nd and 3rd verses give an account of an earthquake, and of an angel descending and rolling away the stone which had been placed on the sepulchre. The evangelist says that the watch shook, and became as dead, and then without a word more about the watch, whether they remained or went away, and without disclosing whether or not the women, whose coming to the sepulchre is mentioned in the first verse, witnessed the rolling away of the stone, he proceeds to mention that the angel told the women that Jesus had risen from the dead, and ordered them to tell the disciples. The women are then described as meeting Jesus in the way, and receiving from him a command to see him in Galilee. The evangelist then introduces the passage about what passed between the watch and the priests, which I have already mentioned, and without saying anything more of the occurrences on

the day of the resurrection, proceeds to mention very shortly the disciples going into Galilee and meeting Jesus there. Now, as we learn from the other evangelists that the apostles saw their Master on the very day of his resurrection, or at any rate professed to have seen him, it seems impossible to believe that Matthew, one of their own body, could have passed over that interview in silence, and contented himself with giving an account of a subsequent meeting between Jesus and the apostles in Galilee.

With respect to the testimony of Mark, there is no small difficulty. The last twelve verses of his gospel are of very doubtful authority; and the weight of testimony seems to be strongly against them. The probability is, I think, that they are spurious. If they should be deemed so, we can hardly avoid the conclusion that death or accident prevented the evangelist from finishing his work, for he can scarcely be supposed to have intended to end his gospel with the 8th verse*. It would be foreign from the object of this work to state the arguments which have induced me to believe that this portion of Scripture is spurious; but, holding that opinion, I am precluded from producing Mark's recital of what passed among the disciples after the resurrection. I will therefore proceed to Luke and John, whose testimony I can see no reason to reject.

The first account given by Luke of the appearance of Jesus to any of his disciples, contained in the last chapter of his gospel, relates that two of them were going on the day of the resurrection to a village

* See Norton on the Genuineness of the Gospels, vol. i. note 4, page 216.

called Emmaus, about threescore furlongs from Jerusalem, and that Jesus drew near and went with them. The 16th verse is remarkable: "But their eyes were holden that they should not (or as perhaps it would be better translated, they did not) know him." Now, as the account of this transaction must have been a communication of the two disciples, none other appearing to have been present but the person whom they represent to have been Jesus, and as they must have intended to assert the reality of his appearance, it seems impossible to conceive that if they had invented a false story for that purpose, they would have thus introduced a circumstance calculated to throw discredit on it. A conversation of some length takes place, and Jesus' disclosing himself is thus described: "And it came to pass, that as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight." It is plain that these disciples believed that they had seen Jesus. I am, however, far from thinking that this narrative of itself affords an argument of much strength to prove the resurrection. The two disciples were not apostles, and the name of one of them is unknown. The other is called Cleophas, which was the name of the husband of the sister of the mother of Jesus, who was the father of the apostle James the Less, so called probably to distinguish him from James the son of Zebedee; but whether this Cleophas was the same as the person mentioned here, we are not informed. All we know therefore is, that the individuals present had been disciples of Jesus; but how often they had been

with him; and what means they had possessed of becoming familiarly acquainted with his person, are matters respecting which we are quite in the dark. Keeping in mind that for a considerable time they did not think that they were talking with Jesus; and that they discovered him only a short time before he left them, I cannot think that this highly interesting story in itself affords any important testimony to the truth of the resurrection, though it is not without some weight as a corroboration of other evidence. Luke goes on to relate that the two disciples went immediately to Jerusalem to the apostles, and that before they told this story they were informed that Jesus had risen, and had appeared to Simon. There can be no doubt, that the Simon here mentioned is Simon Peter; but we have no other account of this interview with Jesus. The two disciples then tell the apostles that they had seen Jesus; and the narrative is continued as follows:—"And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of a honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them. And he said unto them, These are the words which I

spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.” The gospel of Luke ends as follows: “And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.” In order to place together all the evidence afforded by the writings of Luke to prove the resurrection, I shall here give his account of the appearances of Jesus after his resurrection in the book of Acts, which runs thus: “The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments to the apostles whom he had chosen: to whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: and, being assembled together with them,

commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld him, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

The apostle John gives a much fuller account of the appearances of Jesus to his apostles after the resurrection than the other evangelists. The 20th chapter of his gospel, verses 19–29, relates the first two of those interviews: "Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were

the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you : as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost : whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them ; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained. But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them : then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands ; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side ; and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed : blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." The last interview mentioned by John to have taken place between Jesus and his disciples was in Galilee at the sea of Tiberias ; but the particular time is not mentioned. The persons present were Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, and two other disciples. Nathanael is thought, I think on good grounds, to be the apostle Bartholomew. Whether the other two were apostles does not appear. These persons were all fishing on the

lake, and it was on this occasion that the transaction is said to have taken place which is usually called the Miraculous Draught of Fishes. It will not be necessary to state all that passed, but I will merely mention that a conversation ensued between Jesus and Peter of a highly interesting character as particularly concerning what was to befall him and the apostle John.

Let us now look back upon the evidence which has been produced, and inquire whether it affords a sufficient ground to believe that the apostles asserted that their Master had risen from the dead; and that they had on several occasions seen and conversed with him. The truth of the fact is another question which will be dealt with hereafter.

I will, however, first examine the different accounts of the visits of the women to the sepulchre, beginning with the objections to the credibility of the narratives founded on their apparent inconsistencies. First, as to the time of the visit. Matthew tells us that they came to the sepulchre at the end of the sabbath day, as it began to dawn towards the first day of the week; Mark says, it was very early in the morning, the first day of the week, at the rising of the sun; Luke, that it was very early in the morning; and John, that Mary Magdalene (whom alone he mentions) came to the sepulchre early, while it was yet dark. The inconsistency here is in the account of Mark, that it was at the rising of the sun. Though it had begun to dawn, it might without impropriety of language be said to have been still dark, therefore there is no real discrepancy between the accounts of Matthew and John, and Luke fixes no particular time, saying only that it was very early. Mark's account cannot be

reconciled with that of the other evangelists. It has been conjectured by Bishop Pearce that a mistake has occurred in copying this text, and that what the evangelist really wrote was, the sun not having yet risen. This is a mere conjecture, but, if admitted, it would reconcile Mark's narrative with that of the other evangelists.

Secondly, as to the persons who visited the sepulchre. Matthew mentions Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, that is Mary the mother of James; Mark adds Salome; John only names Mary Magdalene; and Luke mentions in the first instance no name, but afterwards says, it was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and other women which were with them, which told these things to the apostles. It must be a very forced construction of this text to apply it to any other persons than those whose visit to the sepulchre had just been described; yet from the circumstance that the name Joanna is here introduced, a strange hypothesis was first propounded by West in his 'Observations on the Resurrection,' which was received with great favour, and is now extensively adopted, that the women went in different parties to the sepulchre, and that the account of Luke relates to a second party of whom they have chosen to make Joanna the leader. This hypothesis is ingeniously defended by West, but as I cannot find the slightest scriptural foundation for it, I forbear making any remarks upon it. It certainly seems strange that the evangelists should have differed so much in their mention of the women at the sepulchre; but there is no contradiction, and therefore nothing to invalidate their testimony.

Thirdly, as to the appearance of the angel, and the

rolling away of the stone from the sepulchre, the conciseness of Matthew's narrative leaves us to get at the succession of events by inference, from comparing one part of the narrative with the others. The apostle then, I think, clearly indicates that the rolling away of the stone took place before the women arrived at the sepulchre. If they had been present, it would have been quite unnecessary for the angel to tell them that Jesus had risen. If then the soldiers alone were present, the information of the evangelist must have been received from them.

Fourthly, what happened when the women visited the sepulchre. Matthew says that the angel set upon the stone which he had rolled from the sepulchre; and he adds: "The angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here, for he is risen as he said. Come and see the place where the Lord lay." It appears, therefore, that the evangelists understood the conversation to have taken place on the outside of the sepulchre; for if the women had entered into it they must have seen where the Lord lay; and an invitation to see it would have been wholly unnecessary. No one could collect from the narrative of Matthew that the women entered the sepulchre. Mark says that the women entered it, and saw a young man sitting on the right side clothed in a long white garment. This appears inconsistent with the account of Matthew, who describes the angel, evidently the same person as the young man mentioned by Mark, as sitting on a stone at the outside of the sepulchre. Grotius endeavours to reconcile these accounts by supposing that there was an enclosure round the

sepulchre ; and that Mark is to be understood to say that the women entered, not into the real sepulchre, but into this enclosure. Now both Matthew and Mark, in describing the burial of Jesus, say that a stone was rolled to the door of the sepulchre ; which was obviously done to secure the body, as it would effectually do, both the evangelists having told us that the sepulchre was hewn out of a rock. Matthew adds, that the stone was sealed, and a watch set. Surely this must have been the real sepulchre, and not an enclosure around it. How could laying a stone at the door of the supposed enclosure have secured the body, unless it was inaccessible all round, of which we have no proof, nor indeed of the existence of any such enclosure ? I cannot regard it in any other light than as a mere fiction of Grotius, invented for the purpose of remedying the apparently conflicting narratives of the two evangelists. We now come to the account of Luke, according to whom, the women entered into the sepulchre, found the body gone, and saw two men standing by them in shining garments. Thus Luke agrees with Mark as to the women having entered the sepulchre, but mentions two men, Mark having only named one. This, however, does not amount to a contradiction. There may have been two angels or men present, although Matthew and Mark, we know not why, mention only one. Greater difficulties than we have hitherto encountered will arise in comparing the account of John with those of the other evangelists. He mentions Mary Magdalene only, and tells us that she went to the sepulchre and found the stone gone, and then ran to Peter and John, and told them

that the body had been taken away, and that she knew not where they had laid it. Nothing is said by her at that time of having seen an angel; but after Peter and John have visited the sepulchre, and left it, Mary is described as having remained there, and seen two angels, and afterwards, Jesus himself. I will here compare the account of her seeing the angels with that given by the other evangelists. John agrees with Luke in saying that there were two angels, but he says that Mary stood without at the sepulchre, that she stooped down and saw two angels in white, one sitting at the head and the other at the feet where the body of Jesus had lain. Thus Matthew describes the women seeing an angel sitting on a stone outside of the sepulchre; Mark says that the women entered the sepulchre, and saw a young man sitting on the right side; Luke, that the women entered the sepulchre, and that while they were much perplexed two men stood by them in shining garments; and John, who mentions Mary Magdalene only, says that she saw two angels within the sepulchre. John therefore agrees with Mark as to the angels, or at least one of them, having been seen sitting within the sepulchre, but he does not say that Mary Magdalene entered the sepulchre. Luke differs with Matthew, and, it seems, with John, in saying that the women entered the sepulchre, and with Mark in mentioning only one angel, and with him and John in saying that the angels were standing. He does not say, in express terms, that the angels were within the sepulchre, but his account implies that they were. It leads one to conclude that the angels were not present, or at least were not

seen by the women at the time when they entered into the sepulchre, but that they appeared afterwards.

Fifthly, as to the conversation of the women with the angels. The narratives of Matthew and Mark agree in substance, but not in words. Both state that the angels told the women not to be afraid; that they knew that they sought Jesus; and that he had risen. They also agree that the angels invited the women to see the place where the body had been laid; directed them to tell his disciples (Mark mentioning Peter by name) that their Master had risen; and that he would go before them into Galilee, where they would see him. Luke's account is more concise. He mentions nothing of the angels telling the women not to be afraid; and he says that the angels put the question to them, "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" instead of asserting that they did so seek him. They tell them that he had risen, but do not command them to tell his disciples. In narrating the concluding part of the address of the angels, he differs remarkably from Matthew and Mark: "He is not here, but is risen; remember how he spake unto you, while he was yet in Galilee, saying, The son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." Thus Galilee is here mentioned for quite a different purpose from that specified in the other gospels. It will be convenient to defer John's account of these transactions till the next head.

Sixthly, as to what occurred after the women had seen the angels at the sepulchre. Matthew's account

is, that they went away to tell the disciples; that Jesus met them, saying, "All hail;" that they held him by the feet, and worshipped him; and that he told them to go and tell his brethren that they should go into Galilee, where they should see him. Mark says that the women went away quickly from the sepulchre; "neither said they anything to any man, for they were afraid." This assertion may perhaps admit of the interpretation that they said nothing to any one whom they met on their way to the disciples; it is however remarkable, that Mark gives no account whatever of the women having collectively given any information to the apostles of the resurrection of Jesus, nor of his having appeared to them; but he adds, that Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene; that she told it to the disciples; and that they did not believe her. I must however observe, that this last account is from that part of the gospel of Mark, the authenticity of which is very doubtful. Luke says that the women returned from the sepulchre and told all these things to the disciples; and that their words seemed to them idle tales, and they believed them not. The account given by John of what followed the vision of angels at the sepulchre requires close attention, as it differs, in some important particulars, from the narratives of the other evangelists. He names Mary Magdalene alone as having gone to the sepulchre; and proceeds to say that she went to Peter and John, and told them that the body of Jesus had been taken away, and that she knew not where they had laid him. The two apostles then went to the sepulchre, and found it as Mary had told them. After they had returned Mary remained,

saw two angels in the sepulchre, and afterwards Jesus himself, with whom she conversed. In the first instance she did not know that it was Jesus, but took him for the gardener (the place of burial being a garden); but she afterwards fully satisfied herself that it was Jesus; she then went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and what he had said to her. Now all this forms a clear, distinct narrative, and appears to leave no room for reasonable doubt that the facts are told in the order in which they happened; nor can I think that any one could have understood it differently, unless some extraneous circumstance had suggested another interpretation. A predetermination to reconcile the accounts of all the evangelists in every particular could alone, it seems, have induced Grotius to venture on a strange attempt to prove that Mary Magdalene did not go to Peter and John until after she had seen Jesus, and that the account given by John of this event, is to be read as a parenthesis. It is evident that this interpretation does violence to the apparent order of the narrative. I will endeavour to show the invalidity of his reasoning; and that he totally fails in the attempt, by means of it, to reconcile the account of John with that of the other evangelists. John, says Grotius, did not make this inversion of the natural order of his narrative without reason. He knew how weak the testimony of women would be held by many; for imbecility of judgment is commonly attributed to that sex. He says that Celsus, writing against the Christians, calls Mary Magdalene a fanatical female; and that John, being about to treat of matters, which, though most true, are hard to be believed, first sets forth what had been seen by

himself and Peter, the latter of whom had already sealed his testimony by his death, and the former, himself, being prepared to suffer on the same account. It is not easy to believe that John (although the most inartificial of writers) would have told his story in this extraordinary manner. The reason given by Grotius might have operated in preventing an historian of the resurrection recording Mary Magdalene's testimony at all ; but how it could have led John or any other writer to cut it in half, and to insert the very important circumstance to which it gave occasion between the two parts of the narrative, exceeds my comprehension. Let us now examine the narrative closely on the hypothesis of Grotius. Mary he supposes to have gone to the sepulchre, and to have found it empty. While she was standing outside of the sepulchre weeping, she saw two angels sitting in the sepulchre who asked her why she wept. She told them because they had taken away the Lord, and she knew not where they had laid him. No answer is said to have been given by the angels ; but Mary turning round saw Jesus himself, and, after some conversation, he says, " Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father ; and to my God, and your God." Mary went to the disciples, and told them that she had seen Jesus. Grotius places the visit of Peter and John to the sepulchre after all these events. Now there is not the slightest suggestion in the narrative that Mary entertained a doubt that she had really seen Jesus. If then she had seen him, she must have known that he had risen ; how then could she have said at that time (v. 2), " they have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not

where they have laid him''? Grotius endeavours to get rid of the difficulty by supposing, that because Jesus had forbidden Mary to touch him, she supposed that what she had seen was not Jesus, but a vision, in contradiction to her own express assertion, that she had seen the Lord. Having thus reviewed the whole narrative, I conclude that the interpretation of Grotius rests on no rational foundation*.

I will now proceed to consider the order in which the events which have been the objects of our attention may have happened. We have seen that, excepting the visit of Peter and John to the sepulchre, all the facts of this part of the gospel history could only have been made known to the apostles by the women. Four of these are mentioned by name, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, and Joanna. Some of the discrepancies in the accounts of the evangelists may be reasonably accounted for by supposing that they derived their narratives from different sources. As John mentions Mary Magdalene only, we can scarcely doubt that his account was received from her; Matthew's may well be referred to the other Mary who is the only person besides Mary Magdalene mentioned by him; Mark adds Salome, from whom he probably derived his account; and as Luke alone mentions Joanna, we may presume that she was the source of his information. It must, however, be admitted to be a strange circumstance, that the evangelist John, who was the son of Salome, does not

* As I have endeavoured to overthrow two interpretations of Grotius, I cannot help adding, that I have in general found his comments on the New Testament more satisfactory than those of any other writer who has fallen in my way.

mention her having paid a visit to the sepulchre, or seem to have derived from her any information on the subject of what passed there. I will now state the order in which the events probably took place, and endeavour to ascertain what are really inconsistencies in the narratives. First, as to the time of the women arriving at the sepulchre. I have already said that it is clear to my mind that the vision of angels (assuming it to be true) must have taken place when all the women mentioned by the evangelists were present; and the hypothesis of West, that Luke's account refers to a different transaction from those narrated by the other evangelists, rests on no scriptural foundation whatever, but directly contradicts Luke himself. It seems to me impossible to reconcile the different narratives of the evangelists as to the time when the women came to the sepulchre; as Mark says it was at the rising of the sun, and John that it was still dark. This discrepancy I do not, however, consider at all to invalidate their testimony. The exact time of their arrival at the sepulchre was an immaterial circumstance, and considering the great events which followed, might have made no lasting impression on their minds. Neither do I see anything improbable in some of the evangelists having mistaken what was said by the women as to a circumstance of no importance in itself, while their minds were fully occupied with the unspeakably great and interesting subject of the resurrection of their Master from the grave. The mistake may easily have taken place if the arriving at the sepulchre was while it was yet dark, but that as some interval passed (which I shall

show presently must have been the case) before the appearance of the angels, that event did not happen till the rising of the sun. Secondly, as to Mary Magdalene going to Peter and John. It appears from John's account, that Mary, on finding the sepulchre empty, suspected that the body had been taken away, and ran and communicated her suspicions to the two apostles. Whether any of the other women went with her is not said; but it seems most probable that they did not. Thirdly, as to the visit of Peter and John to the sepulchre. This transaction is not mentioned by Matthew or Mark. Luke merely says that Peter ran to the sepulchre, and this was after the women had told the disciples that they had seen a vision of angels. I see no possibility of reconciling this with the account of John; and as he, being a party concerned in the transaction, must have known the truth, I cannot entertain a doubt that this part of Luke's narrative is erroneous. It was probably the impossibility of reconciling it with the interpretation ordinarily given to John's narrative of the visit of the apostles to the sepulchre, which led Grotius to adopt the strange interpretation which we have just examined. Fourthly, as to the appearance of the angels at the sepulchre. Any one reading the account of Matthew would certainly understand the angel to have appeared to the women immediately on their arrival at the sepulchre; and the narratives of Mark and Luke would lead to the same conclusion. I have, however, already endeavoured to show that the visit of Peter and John to the sepulchre must have been before the appearance of the angels. The

reason of the omission by Matthew and Mark of this event I cannot pretend to give, nor can I account for John's mentioning Mary Magdalene only, and saying nothing of the presence of the other women at the sepulchre. Fifthly, as to the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene. This event seems to have happened before Jesus showed himself to all the women together. From John's narration we should conclude that it was immediately after her answer to the question of the angels, "Woman, why weep-est thou?" As it is not said that the angel gave her any information, as he is said to have done to the women in the accounts of the other evangelists, I understand by the words, "she turned herself back," that she went away from the sepulchre, leaving the other women there; shortly after which, Jesus appeared to her. Why he forbid Mary at this time to touch him, and shortly afterwards permitted the women to hold him by the feet, does not appear. Sixthly, as to the interview of Jesus with the women, and the account they afterwards gave to the disciples. That the apostle John, who, throughout the preceding part of his narrative, had mentioned Mary Magdalene only, should say nothing of the appearance of Jesus to the other women, is not perhaps to be wondered at; but that Luke should have omitted it, seems extraordinary and unaccountable. I have already given my reasons for thinking that the gospel of Mark was left by the author in an unfinished state, and that the last twelve verses have been added by some subsequent writer. The fact is distinctly mentioned by Matthew, and as he was an apostle, he must have had the best means of knowing

what the account which the women gave to the disciples really was. Strange as it must appear, I cannot help concluding that this part of the transaction was unknown to Luke. The 22nd verse of the 24th chapter is strongly confirmatory of this. "Yea," says one of the disciples at Emmaus, "and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre; and when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive."

The conclusions to be drawn from what has been said, are, I think, that it is impossible to reconcile all the accounts of the evangelists as to the details of what happened on and after the visit of the women to the sepulchre; but that their discrepancies are such as might well have arisen in the independent testimony of different witnesses to the same transaction, and consequently do not lessen the weight of their evidence to the main fact—the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

It is not, however, to the testimony of the women that we are to look for the proper evidence of the truth of the resurrection. They soon disappear from the history; and we know nothing of their subsequent conduct. From the apostles, his chosen companions in life, and the promulgators of his religion in the world, we must seek for the proofs of the resurrection of their Master from the dead.

The first question is, have we sufficient reason to admit that the apostles really professed to believe the resurrection of Jesus by constantly asserting it; and by treating it as the proof and foundation of their authority in preaching the Christian

religion? That this may have been so, no one can deny. Supposing then such to have been the fact, we have now to consider what evidence we could reasonably expect to substantiate it. Christianity must have had a beginning. That it was derived from Christ, and that he died as a malefactor in the reign of Tiberius, we have the express testimony of Tacitus. "Of the primitive condition of Christianity," Paley well observes, "a distant only and general view can be acquired from heathen writers. It is in our own books that the detail and interior of the transaction must be sought for. All this is nothing different from what might have been expected. Who would write a history of Christianity but a Christian? Who was likely to record the travels, sufferings, labours or successes of the apostles, but one of their own number, or of their followers?" If this be held a correct view of the subject, we must either admit the New Testament to contain a credible account of the conduct and history of the early teachers of the Christian religion, or we must conclude that it is impossible for us to obtain such an account; and the origin of a religion which has extended over a great part of the world, and which is, in some form or other, the professed religion of the most intelligent and civilized nations, lies hid in impenetrable darkness. I can perceive no difficulty in preferring the former alternative. I cannot see why the testimony of the professors of Christianity, Mahometanism or any other religion, as to common historical facts, is to be rejected, unless some fraudulent or interested purpose could have been answered by it. That the books of the New Testament are very ancient, admits of no dispute. That

their authority, or at least that of the gospels, the Acts, and the far larger number of the epistles, has been admitted from very early times, must be granted. I shall endeavour to show presently that the account they give of the early history of Christianity is in itself credible ; and agrees with what we know from other sources of the state and condition of the Christians, and of the feelings of the Jews and heathens towards them. These narratives then, as to the common facts, I am bound to admit to be true ; and the important question for our decision is, whether the common facts of the New Testament history afford satisfactory proof of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This the Christian apologist is bound to prove ; and he is fairly entitled to claim our serious and candid attention to his arguments. I have selected the resurrection of Christ, because, if the question should be decided in the affirmative, it is conclusive ; as I do not find that any who has admitted this fact has denied the Divine authority of the Christian religion ; and because, if we fail in proving the resurrection of Christ, I cannot discover any arguments by which the truth of the other miracles of the gospel history can be proved.

I have already said that, to prove a miracle, it is essential that the witnesses should be placed in such circumstances that they could not be deceived ; that there must be satisfactory proof that they did not intend to deceive others ; and that if there are several witnesses, they should agree in the main fact to be proved. As to the third condition, no difficulty can arise. Not only the apostles and their followers, but all Christians in every age down to the present, have

agreed in believing that Jesus Christ really rose from the dead. With respect to the first requisite, that they could not be deceived, we will again review those parts of the narratives of what passed between the alleged resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. I will premise that the twelve apostles had been for a considerable period the chosen companions and friends of Jesus. One of them had proved a traitor, and disclosed to his enemies his private retreat for the purpose of enabling them to apprehend him without any risk of exciting a tumult among the people. After the death of Jesus, the eleven apostles kept together; but there is nothing in the history to show that they entertained any expectation that their Master had risen from the dead. On the contrary, Luke distinctly says, that they did not believe the women who had been at the sepulchre; and Mark, if the controverted verses at the end of his gospel should be held authentic, agrees with Luke. Mary Magdalene says to the apostles Peter and John, "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him." And subsequently she makes a complaint to the angels in nearly the same terms. I have already endeavoured to show that what John believed when he saw the linen clothes lying in the sepulchre was not, as has been supposed by some, the resurrection of Jesus, but that his body had been removed. The disciples at Emmaus say, "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." This seems to show that the death of Jesus had put an end to their hopes; and that they did not entertain any expectation that he would be raised from the dead, and

restored to life. The first indication of the apostles having believed in the resurrection, is found in the account of what passed on the return of the disciples from Emmaus to Jerusalem, when they were told that the Lord had risen, and had appeared to Simon. Immediately after this, however, when Jesus is represented to have appeared to them, they are said to have been terrified, and to have supposed that they had seen a spirit, and not to have been satisfied till he had shown them his hands and his feet. Even then the evangelist says that they believed not for joy. According to John, the incredulity of the apostle Thomas was carried so far as to determine him to reject all evidence of the resurrection unless he could examine the person of Jesus with his hand; which he was afterwards allowed to do. At an interview of Jesus with his disciples in Galilee, Matthew says that some of them doubted. As the eleven disciples only are mentioned by the evangelist, the interpretation of this passage which first presents itself is, that some of them doubted; but, as we shall see, by their subsequent conduct, that they professed an unhesitating conviction of the resurrection of Christ; and as there appears to be no other way of accounting for their conduct than that they really believed it; and as Matthew does not say that other persons were not present, it seems reasonable to suppose that those who doubted were either some who had not been well acquainted with his person previously; or who were at too great a distance to see him distinctly. This may well have been the case, if, as St. Paul tells us (1 Cor. xv. 6), he was once seen by five hundred brethren at once, which may be the very time here mentioned by the

evangelist. It seems quite incredible that St. Paul should have written this text unless a large number of the disciples had either seen, or professed to have seen, Jesus at the same time.

The historians of the New Testament having shown that the apostles had no expectation of the resurrection of Jesus, and that they were very slow to believe it, let us consider whether their assertion of it as a fact is credible or incredible, whether it should be received or rejected. In the first place, the writers of these narratives were evidently believers in the Divine authority of the Christian religion, and of the resurrection of Christ, which is a most important proof of it. If then we suspect any bias to have operated in their minds to give a particular colouring to the facts which they relate, it must have been on the favourable side. It might not be unreasonable to suppose that they might suppress unfavourable circumstances; but that they should insert anything which had not happened, and which was of such a nature as to afford an argument against the truth of the resurrection, is wholly incredible. Such is their account of the incredulity of the apostles and of their reluctance to believe, even after ocular demonstration, of Jesus' having risen. It is true that this argument may be satisfactorily answered by the fact, that, however reluctant they were to give their assent to the resurrection in the first instance, their subsequent conduct clearly shows that they ultimately received it with unhesitating conviction. This fact, however, affords no ground at all for the supposition of the evangelists having introduced a fiction into their narratives for no conceivable purpose, and calculated

to afford a plausible argument to their opponents against the fact they intended to establish. I conclude then that the testimony of the evangelists on this head is fully entitled to our credence.

The conduct of the apostles, as we shall presently see, shows beyond the possibility of doubt that they really believed that they had seen Jesus after his resurrection; or, at the least, that they professed to have seen him; and behaved in such a manner as must have disposed all who witnessed their conduct to admit that they really believed what they professed. There are only three ways of accounting for this: either they were deceived themselves, or they endeavoured to deceive others, or their testimony is true. With respect to the first of these suppositions, I must leave it to every candid reader to decide whether under the circumstances of the case any reasonable doubt can be entertained that they really believed that Jesus had risen from the dead, and had, on several occasions, appeared to them. In this part of our subject, we must assume that the apostles acted with good faith in their representations of the interviews which they alleged to have taken place between them and their Master. The question of their intention to deceive will form the next head of our inquiry. The narratives of the evangelists inform us that Jesus repeatedly appeared to the apostles; that they not only saw him, but that they laid their hands upon his person and felt the marks of the nails with which he had been fixed to the cross, and examined the wound which had been made in his side while he hung upon the cross; that they conversed with him, saw him eat and drink, received his command to publish his

religion in the world, and saw him ascend into the air, and disappear. Could then, I ask, those who had lived familiarly with him for a considerable period have been deceived as to his person? Supposing the resurrection of a dead man from the grave to be a matter capable of proof, which Hume alone, to the best of my knowledge, denies, I cannot see how it could be proved in a more satisfactory, or, indeed, in any other manner, than by the testimony recorded in the gospels and the book of Acts. But it may be said, that although the evidence of their senses would be conclusive of the truth of the fact to those who were eye-witnesses, it cannot possibly have the same force with us who live more than eighteen centuries after it is said to have taken place. This opens the question, whether any historical evidence can be of sufficient force to command a rational assent to a miracle having been worked. If the negative answer be given to this question, it will follow that the Deity can by no other means give evidence of a miracle in proof of a revelation of his will, than by its occurring before the eyes of each individual. Surely, the human mind ought not to presume to lay down such a proposition. In all cases our business is not to prescribe beforehand what means must be resorted to by the Deity to effect his purposes. We must take the evidence produced in each case, and decide upon its validity by the best exercise in our power of our rational and moral faculties. I readily concede that working a miracle is in itself no certain proof that the person who works it is to be considered a teacher sent from God, because I cannot pronounce it to be certainly impossible for any

one to do this unless he is immediately inspired and authorized by God. I say, it does not seem to me that we are in a condition to assert that it is absolutely impossible for any one to work a miracle without authority immediately derived from God. I fully believe that this is the case; and I see no evidence in any quarter in contradiction to it*. Still I cannot assert that the human mind can pronounce absolutely its impossibility. It may be conceived, although I feel fully satisfied that such a thing never has happened, and never will happen, that a miracle might be worked, and that the person who worked it might promulgate some doctrine which would be at once rejected by our moral faculty, as that children might lawfully murder their aged parents to get rid of the trouble of taking care of them, and to enjoy the advantage of succeeding to their property. Such an atrocious doctrine would at once be rejected by the general sentiment and feelings of mankind; and any superhuman power exercised by him who promulgated it would certainly not be ascribed to the Great Author of our being. But this supposition, though, as it does not involve a contradiction, I do not see that we can pronounce to be absolutely impossible, is not founded on any known fact; and we have no reason to believe that it has ever been realized. We must then conclude that a miracle can only be performed by the direct agency of the Deity so long as no proof can be adduced of such an event having taken place under such circumstances as forbid our ascribing it to his will. It will add much

* See Hugh Farmer's excellent work on 'Miracles'.

strength to this view of the subject, if the miracle shall appear to have a strong tendency to advance the well-being of the human race, especially their moral and spiritual improvement. We will proceed then to consider whether we have sufficient reason to believe that the apostles, in bearing their testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, had no intention to deceive; and whether the religion which they promulgated was calculated to improve the character and the condition of the human race.

A fire occurred in Rome in the year 64, by which a large portion of the city was destroyed. This was little more than thirty, and certainly not more than thirty-five years, after the crucifixion of Jesus. Tacitus says that the religion of the Christians, which he calls a pernicious superstition, had, at that time, not only spread over Judea, but had reached Rome. The emperor Nero, having been accused of setting fire to the city himself, in order to suppress the rumour, accused the Christians of having perpetrated the fact, and a dreadful persecution of them was the consequence*. Tacitus, whose mind was profound and philosophical, no doubt regarded the religion professed by the Roman people in no other light than as a useful political institution; and while he would have laughed at any one who could suppose that he believed in the wild stories of the gods in the heathen mythology, he probably thought it necessary that some sort of religion should be supported by the state, and that it was the duty of a good citizen or subject to support the established religion of his

* Tacitus, *Annal.* xv. 44.

country. Christianity is necessarily opposed to all other religions; and its professors must have condemned the idolatry which surrounded them. It is in the highest degree improbable that Tacitus had taken any pains to examine in detail the evidences on which the Christians rested the Divine authority of their religion. It was enough for him that they set themselves against the religion which, for political reasons, he felt himself bound to support. The use which I now make of his testimony is to show that the Christian religion, within at most five and thirty years of the death of its founder, had so far spread in the world as to reach the Imperial city, and to become considerable enough to engage the attention of the monster who then sat on the throne, and to make its professors the objects of his false accusation, and of his hideous cruelty. Now this could only have been effected by the most strenuous exertions of those who promulgated the new religion. What those exertions were, and in what manner the followers of Christ proceeded in establishing his religion, the New Testament informs us, and we have no other account of those transactions. I can see no reason whatever why we should dispute the common facts of the New Testament history; and the question recurs, do they prove the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead?

I will now proceed with the history of the apostles given by the evangelist Luke in the book of Acts. After the alleged ascension of Jesus, the first account we have is contained in the 12th, 13th and 14th verses of the first chapter: "Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from

Jerusalem a sabbath-day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren." The apostles appear to have clearly understood that they were to bear witness of the resurrection of Jesus, and to promulgate his religion in the world. Their next proceeding is of a very extraordinary character. As their original number twelve had been diminished by the treachery of Judas in delivering his Master into the hands of his enemies, their first step was to supply his place by electing another person to the apostleship, who, from his previous acquaintance with Jesus, would be qualified to bear testimony to his resurrection. The number of the disciples who were assembled on this occasion is said to have been about one hundred and twenty. Peter, who had always taken the leading part among the apostles in the lifetime of Jesus, and who still continued to do so, after referring to the treason of Judas, and giving an account of his death, proceeded to say that some one who had been with them from the baptism of John till the ascension of Jesus, must be ordained to be a witness with the apostles of the resurrection. No command is found in any of the gospels, or in the Acts, by Christ to the apostles, to fill up the vacancy in their number occasioned by the treachery of Judas, and at this time they do not claim to have been illuminated by Divine in-

spiration; the election therefore of a successor to Judas seems to have been suggested by nothing but their own sense of what was fit and proper. The mode of election adopted was by casting lots, the apostles having previously selected two individuals, and prayed to God to show which of the two he had chosen. Now this is certainly a strange proceeding, and such as could hardly have been adopted by any but very simple-minded persons. Assuming the necessity of appointing a successor to Judas, the mode of choice which would have occurred to reflecting persons would, one should think, be either by making it in accordance with their own judgment, or referring it to the Almighty to give some manifestation of his will as to the person to be appointed. The plan of selecting by their own choice two individuals, and then referring it to God to say which he preferred, could, I think, only have occurred to persons of great simplicity of character, and of minds but little trained to reflection. Some thinking persons have been led by the strangeness of the proceeding to doubt the real apostleship of Matthias, who was elected; and to consider the apostle Paul to be the real successor of Judas; and it has been thought a confirmation of this opinion that Matthias is nowhere mentioned again in the New Testament. There is, however, little weight in these objections to the apostleship of Matthias, which has been acknowledged in all ages of the Church. With respect to the apostle Paul, we have no reason to believe that he had any personal acquaintance with Jesus; and as he speaks of the appearance of Jesus to him at his conversion as to one born out of time, it seems clear that he did not personally know him; and there-

fore he could not have been a witness of his resurrection, which was one of the primary duties of the apostleship. It does not appear at what time Paul became an apostle ; and it seems probable that it was not till after the death of James, so that the number of the apostles never exceeded twelve at one time. At that period the fact of the resurrection of Christ had been established to the satisfaction of a great number of Christians, and the apostolical powers were probably conferred on Paul for the more effectual promulgation of the gospel among the Gentiles, for whom his energies were mainly exerted. As to Matthias not being mentioned afterwards, the same thing may be said of all the apostles except Peter, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, and James the son of Alphaeus. Judas, the brother of James, is understood to have been the author of the short epistle bearing his name. The names of none of the other apostles occur after the enumeration of them in the first chapter of the book of Acts. Philip, who is mentioned in that book, was not the apostle, but the deacon. The story of the election of Matthias seems to me to have the strongest mark of authenticity. I cannot think it possible that any one contriving a fictitious narrative for the purpose of supporting the Christian religion, could have introduced so extraordinary a circumstance.

I shall not, on the present occasion, go into the transaction of the day of Pentecost ; but shall proceed at once to consider the testimony afforded by the conduct of the apostles of their belief in the resurrection of Jesus. The public teaching of the apostles commenced with the address of Peter to the multitude who had gathered together. Let us attend to what

he says on the subject before us, Acts ii. 22-24 : “Ye men of Israel, hear these words ; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know : him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain : whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death ; because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.” Here we have an open profession by one who could not have been deceived of his belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and we shall find throughout the history of the apostles, contained in the book of Acts, that such was their unanimous testimony. The question then will be, have we sufficient reason to believe that they were led by ambition, interest, or some other personal object, to assert what they knew to be false ? If it shall turn out that their conduct entirely negatives such a supposition, nothing remains but to acknowledge the truth of their testimony, and consequently to admit the Divine authority of the Christian religion. In this inquiry particular attention will be paid to the conduct of the apostle Peter, who took the leading part in the first promulgation of the Christian faith.

The next transaction recorded in the 3rd chapter of the book of Acts is the healing of a lame man by Peter and John. On this occasion Peter addresses the people around him in the following words : “Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this ? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as if by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk ? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers,

hath glorified his son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses." The 4th chapter begins thus: "And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day; for it was now eventide." The next day they are brought before the High Priest and other authorities, and, being interrogated as to the healing of the lame man, Peter, in part of his answer, says: "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole." Here and in all other places the apostles represent themselves as acting by the authority of Jesus Christ. After this the apostles were sent aside, and the rulers, having conferred among themselves, commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. "But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. So when they had further threatened them" (the narrative continues), "they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men

glorified God for that which was done." In the 5th chapter we find the apostles seized and put in prison. They are described as having been delivered by an angel, and going and teaching the people in the temple; when they are again brought before the council, vv. 27-32: "And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the High Priest asked them, saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? And behold ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him." By the wise advice of Gamaliel, the council are induced to adopt a milder course than they would have otherwise pursued. "And when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."

Having traced thus far the proceedings of the apostles, and seeing that by preaching the gospel they exposed themselves to stripes and imprisonment; and had great reason to expect still more severe treatment,

from which they were only kept by the sober advice of a discreet and moderate man ; I now ask, why did the apostles pursue this course ? If we believe them, it was because their Lord and Master Jesus Christ had risen from the dead ; had instructed them to promulgate his religion ; and had promised them supernatural aid ; and that they had been the recipients of powers from on high, in the gift of tongues and other spiritual endowments. If we reject their testimony, we must believe that twelve men agreed together to impose on the world by a tale of falsehood, and on that tale to found a new religion of a pure and holy character, such as the world had never known before, and the immeasurable superiority of which to all others is at the present day recognized in all the most civilized parts of the world. They must at the same time have been endeavouring to impose on the world a gross falsehood, and to inculcate lessons of the most exalted piety, the most expansive benevolence, of truth, justice, temperance, fortitude, and every virtue which adorns human nature. They must have persisted in the assertion of this falsehood, and in their plan of establishing a new religion, not only with no aid from without, but in direct opposition to the religious feelings of their own country, and to the professed religion of that mighty empire which had extended its dominion over all those nations of the earth which had reached the highest state of civilization. To the Jews they preached, that he who had been rejected by them, condemned by their rulers, and on their accusation, consigned by the Roman governor to a shameful and most painful death, was in truth no other than the Messiah, whose advent had been foretold by their

prophets. Unawed by the power of imperial Rome, they boldly denounced the idolatrous and polytheistic religion of the empire ; taught that an idol is nothing in the world ; and that the universe was formed and is sustained by one God, in whom we live, and move, and have our being. To believe that fraud and falsehood could have been thus combined with an attempt to set up a new religion so exalted, so pure, so admirable, that nothing that is truly excellent has been added to it in the long succession of ages which has passed away since its first establishment in the world, is to me impossible ; and I cannot see that any one can adopt this opinion who has not previously made up his mind to reject all evidence which can possibly be produced to prove a Divine revelation. I have therefore no hesitation in declaring my firm conviction that the Christian religion is what it professes to be—a revelation from God ; and I shall be relieved from the restraint which the nature of the inquiry we have been engaged in has hitherto imposed upon me of treating as doubtful, facts of the truth of which I entertain no doubt ; and shall from henceforth, whenever I have occasion to mention Jesus Christ, unhesitatingly recognize him as what he always professed himself to be, the Son of God, the Mediator between God and man, the Saviour of the world.

It will be proper here to notice a plausible objection to the view which I have just taken of the subject in hand. It may be said, that all which I have stated goes only to prove the sincerity of the first preachers of Christianity, and that sincerity in religious profession is so far from being a proof of the truth of the professed creed, that it may be found

in the followers of every religion in the world, among Jews and Mahometans, Brahmins and Buddhists, and the followers of every known form of idolatrous worship; and that all these hold to their opinions with as much tenacity as any Christian professor; and that numbers are to be found among them who are ready to sacrifice their worldly interests, and to endure persecution for conscience sake. This is undoubtedly true; and it must be conceded, that sincerity in the belief of any particular religion affords no proof of its truth. It is not, however, sincerity in the profession of a mere belief or opinion that we are concerned with at present. Our business is to ascertain the evidence of a fact. The apostles, like other men, were no doubt liable to fall into error in matters of opinion, and in matters of faith, unless they were enlightened by Divine wisdom; but in the fact of having seen the Saviour after his resurrection they could not possibly be deceived; and I have endeavoured to show that there is no rational ground to think that they intended to deceive others. Unless, therefore, we are prepared to give up all reliance on human testimony, I do not perceive how we can refuse our assent to that of the apostles in proof of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I shall now proceed to produce other parts of the New Testament, to show that the apostles were not actuated by interest or ambition. That they could not have looked for riches or worldly honours or rank, is apparent from the whole of their history. If they were urged on by ambition, it must have been as leaders of the new religion; and the proof of this would be their arrogating to themselves powers and

privileges beyond what was required for the purposes of their mission. If the early history of Christianity contained in the New Testament be true, it follows that great authority must have been yielded by the early Christians to the apostles who had been the constant companions of our Saviour; had therefore enjoyed the best means of becoming fully acquainted with his doctrines; and were the chosen witnesses of his resurrection from the dead. To a considerable extent, therefore, they must have exercised power in the infant Church. We will now inquire whether they endeavoured to strain it beyond its just limits. My observations on this head will be confined to those who were apostles at the commencement of their public teaching. The very remarkable history and character of St. Paul will be the subject of future consideration.

In the 6th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles we are informed that complaints had arisen among the Grecian converts against the Hebrews, that the widows of the former had been neglected in the daily administration of charity which took place among the Christians. The apostles desired to find a remedy for this evil; and, that their time might be given to prayer and to the ministry of the Word, they deemed it expedient to appoint seven men to attend to this business. The appointment or election of these deacons, as they are usually called, was an act of power to be exercised by some one. Did the apostles then arrogate this appointment to themselves? Instead of doing so, they left the selection of the individuals to the general body of believers; afterwards confirming the choice of the brethren by prayer, and

laying hands on those who had been selected for the office of deacon.

In the 15th chapter of the same book we have an account of a dispute which had arisen at Antioch. Before this time Paul and Barnabas had preached the gospel in many different places ; and had been very successful in converting Gentiles to Christianity. Some Jews had come down to Antioch ; and had taught that it was necessary that the Gentile converts should be circumcised after the manner of Moses. This doctrine having been resisted by Paul and Barnabas, they, with some others, were sent to Jerusalem to consult the apostles and elders about this question. Now, what is the conduct of the apostles ? Considering their station in the Church, it might be reasonably expected that they would at once, and of their own authority, decide the question. This, however, was not the case. After some discussion, in which the apostles Peter and James take the leading part, they came to a conclusion as follows, vv. 22-29 : “ Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas ; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas ; and Silas, chief men among the brethren ; and they wrote letters by them after this manner : The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia : forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law, to whom we gave no such commandment ; it seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to

send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things ; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication : from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.” This is a remarkable document ; and it well deserves our serious attention. It clearly appears from it that the apostles did not arrogate to themselves exclusive authority in the Christian church. The sending of Judas and Silas to Antioch is the act, not of them only, but of the apostles, elders, and the whole Church ; and the letter sent is from the apostles, elders, and brethren. We have among us in this country some who profess to be successors of the apostles. Would they be content with the degree of authority which was exercised by these founders of the Christian Church ?

I shall here introduce some observations tending to show that the apostles, and especially Peter, were not influenced by motives of ambition. Peter, who was evidently a man of a sanguine and ardent character, uniformly takes the leading part among the apostles in the whole course of our Lord’s personal ministry, and in the earlier transactions which followed his ascension. We shall find that a change takes place afterwards, and that James the son of Alphaeus apparently occupies the highest post at Jerusalem. He is often indeed called the bishop of Jerusalem ; but the

ideas affixed in modern times to that designation have but little application, as I shall show hereafter, to the original condition of the primitive Church. I shall first endeavour to prove that the presidency among the apostles was actually exercised by James; and we will then try to find a reason for his appointment. Lardner writes thus respecting the transaction which we have just been considering: "When the controversy about the manner of receiving the Gentiles was brought before 'the apostles and elders,' assembled in council at Jerusalem; 'after there had been much disputing,' Peter spake, and then Barnabas and Paul. After all which James speaks last, sums up the argument, and proposeth the terms on which the Gentiles should be received. To which the whole assembly agreed. And they sent letters to the Gentiles in several places accordingly. It is manifest, I think, that James presided in this council." In the 21st chapter of Acts we have an account of a visit of St. Paul and his companions to Jerusalem; vv. 17-19 run thus: "And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry." It is very difficult to assign any reason for James being particularly mentioned here, except that he exercised some sort of authority and pre-eminence in the Church. James, however, appears to have acted as the president of the assembly only, and the advice of the persons assembled to Paul is represented to have been given by the whole assembly. It was long after

this that Christian teachers assumed to themselves authority to decide on matters affecting religion, to the exclusion of the laity. In the 9th verse of the 2nd chapter of the epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul mentions James, Cephas, and John as pillars, and says that they gave the right hands of fellowship to him and Barnabas. Eusebius strangely supposes that the Cephas here mentioned is not Peter, but some other person having the same name. Nothing can apparently be more improbable than this supposition. In the ministry of our Saviour on earth, Peter, and James and John, the sons of Zebedee, had been, on many important occasions, distinguished by him; and we have seen that Peter was the leading character among the apostles in the transactions which shortly followed the resurrection. It does not appear at what time this visit of Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem took place. Paley thinks it probable that they had gone to that city on an occasion which is not mentioned in the Acts. Whether this were so, or this is the identical visit mentioned in the 15th chapter of Acts, is of no material consequence. If it be referred to this time, the apostle James, the son of Zebedee, had been previously killed by Herod; and whenever the visit happened, there is nothing improbable in supposing it to have been after his death. That apostle then, having been removed, whom should we expect to find the most distinguished among that body, and as such aptly described as pillars of the Church, but the two who remained alive of the three who had been particularly honoured by the favour of their Master, and James, who is on two occasions shown in the book of Acts to have taken a prominent

part in the proceedings of the Christian assembly? That in mentioning the leading characters among the disciples, St. Paul should have omitted the name of Peter, and inserted that of another Cephas, who is mentioned in no other part of the New Testament, is so improbable as to amount almost to a moral impossibility. I can therefore entertain no doubt that the Cephas mentioned by St. Paul is no other than the apostle Peter; and as James is placed first, that circumstance strongly corroborates the evidence drawn from the Acts, that he exercised the presiding authority at Jerusalem.

I will now endeavour to discover why Peter was thus, as it were, deposed from his pre-eminence among the apostles, and James advanced to preside in their council in his stead; and I think a very satisfactory reason may easily be found. Lardner quotes the following passage from Eusebius:—"Clement, in his sixth book of his Institutions, writes after this manner: that after the Lord's ascension, Peter, and James, and John, though they had been favoured by the Lord above the rest, did not contend for honour, but chose James the Just to be bishop of Jerusalem." Considering the peculiar favour shown by our Saviour to Peter, James, and John, it is impossible that they should not, after his ascension, have been held in higher estimation than the other apostles. To Peter the first place would be assigned, as he had been accustomed uniformly to take the lead, and he had been particularly charged by Christ, after his resurrection, to feed his sheep and his lambs; in other words, to instruct his disciples in religion. Peter was a man of great activity and energy of cha-

racter. Such persons are the natural leaders of the rest of the world ; and it can hardly be called ambition that they desire to be so. All men, even the best, are pleased by being distinguished above others ; and it is scarcely possible to suppose that Peter did not wish to retain the influence, and exercise the authority to which he had been accustomed. With respect to James and John, they had shown that they desired power and distinction by the request made by them to Jesus that they might sit on his right hand and his left in his kingdom. How then are we to account for these three distinguished apostles yielding precedence to one who does not appear to have ever been particularly distinguished by their Master ? I see but one solution ; which, however, is quite satisfactory. If the great object of the apostles was to establish Christianity, and if their desire to do so was so strong as to overcome all personal regards to their own interest or ambition, a satisfactory solution of the difficulty is afforded. The world is always ready to suggest some selfish motives for the actions of all who endeavour to promote reformation of whatever kind. Peter, James, and John had been greatly distinguished by Jesus Christ ; and if the Christian community had ranged itself under the banner of either of them, it might have led to a plausible charge of these apostles imposing upon the world a system of religious faith and practice for the purpose of establishing their own authority. That the election of James to the presidency was made for this reason seems to me highly probable ; and there is no difficulty in supposing that it was a recommendation of him that was the cousin of our Lord.

Peter, in common with the other apostles, had been charged by Jesus not to assume arrogant titles or undue authority: "Be ye not called Rabbi; for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth; for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters; for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.*" That the apostle Peter obeyed the command of his Master appears from the following texts: "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.†" Those who are conversant with ecclesiastical history will be apt to imagine that these passages of the New Testament have accidentally dropped out of the copies of all hierarchies, episcopal, presbyterian, &c. A large portion of the Christian laity seem now to be awakening from a long slumber; and to be disposed to assert their charter of religious liberty in opposition to those who claim to be the sole depositaries of Divine truth. May success attend them; and may all who profess earnestly and truly to be disciples of Jesus Christ rejoice in the liberty he has given them. May the New Testament be considered the supreme authority in matters of religion; and may every one, according to his opportunities, "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" it. But to do so effectually, the spirit of humility must combine

* Matt. xxiii. 9.

† 1 Peter, v. 2, 3.

with the spirit of liberty, and both must be sanctified by the spirit of prayer. We must study the Sacred Volume with a full sense of the infirmity of our minds, and our consequent liability to error ; and must be ready to avail ourselves of every practicable assistance from the labours of those who have travelled in the same path, and for the same purpose. Let us look with respect to those who have come with honest minds to the study of the Scriptures ; and receive them not as the lords, but as the helpers of our faith. I hope, and am persuaded, that the number of those who study the New Testament for themselves is steadily increasing ; and that the time is arriving when the far greater part of the controversies which have disturbed the Christian Church will be consigned to oblivion. That which is necessary to guide us in the way of salvation may assuredly be found in the instructions of our Saviour and his disciples contained in the New Testament ; and though we may meet with much in the Sacred Volume which we are unable to explain, we shall everywhere find the love of God and of man, and every virtue which can adorn human nature, earnestly and authoritatively inculcated. Let us then adhere closely to the Sacred Record, studying for ourselves ; undeterred by the cries of heresy, schism, and the like, which will be sure to be raised against us if we should arrive at conclusions at variance with the opinions of those who enjoy the world's favour, and to whom the profession of godliness has proved great gain.

I will now proceed with the history of the apostles and other early teachers of Christianity which is contained in the book of Acts. We have seen already

that certain individuals had been appointed to regulate the charitable distributions of the Christian assembly. We are told that Stephen, one of these persons, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.* A fierce opposition arose against him; a false accusation was laid to his charge; and after a defence of considerable length, but which he was not permitted to finish, he was stoned to death. A young man named Saul, who was destined to assume afterwards a most distinguished character in the early history of the Christian Church, is said to have been present, and to have been consenting to Stephen's death. "As for Saul," the narrative proceeds, "he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.†" Now as this man Saul was no other than the apostle Paul, who afterwards became a most distinguished preacher of the gospel; and whose labours in converting the Gentiles to Christianity so greatly exceeded those of the other apostles as to occasion him to be designated as the apostle of the Gentiles; and as Luke, to whom the authorship of the book of Acts is attributed by the concurrent testimony of all Christian antiquity, was the friend and companion of Paul, there can be no reasonable suspicion that this account of the persecution of the Christians is untrue; for certainly no friend of the apostle would feign a story so little to his honour; and we have therefore evidence as satisfactory of the reality of this transaction as we can have of any fact which took place centuries ago.

* Acts vi. 8.

† Acts viii. 3.

The remainder of the 8th chapter does not contain anything which has a direct bearing on the subject which I am now going to investigate, that is, what were the instructions given by the apostles and early teachers in the Christian Church ; and in what manner its affairs were ordered and directed. I shall transcribe the early part of the 9th chapter, which contains a short account of a very memorable transaction to which I shall have frequent occasions to refer hereafter. “And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughters against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the High Priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus : and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven : and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ? And he said, Who art thou, Lord ? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest : it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth ; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man : but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.” The account goes on to show how his sight was restored, and that he was baptized ; and adds :

“And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard were amazed, and said : Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests ?” Such is the account given by Luke of the conversion of St. Paul ; and we shall find in the progress of our inquiries that his own account of it on several occasions is consistent with it. I can conceive of no one, who has not resolutely predetermined to resist all rational evidence, doubting that St. Paul fully believed that he had actually seen Jesus Christ, and had been instructed by him to preach the gospel ; and that in consequence of that conviction he devoted himself to the propagation of the Christian religion ; and, in pursuance of that object exposed himself (as we shall presently see) to a life of severe privation, great danger, and actual persecution. He was a man of great natural abilities, which had been improved by a learned education. It does not appear that he had had any previous knowledge of Jesus ; but he was several times in communication with the other apostles ; and was well able to judge of the weight due to their testimony when they asserted that they had seen and conversed with Jesus Christ after his resurrection. If Christianity had been indeed a cunningly devised fable, no man could have been placed in a more favourable situation to discover its falsehood than St. Paul, and his early opinions and his strong feelings against the religion of Christ could not have failed to dispose him to exert his best faculties for that purpose. Sincerity marked his character alike as Saul the per-

secutor, and as Paul the apostle, and the most able and ardent defender and promulgator of the Christian religion. At all times he obeyed the dictates of his conscience; though in the end he was led deeply to repent the errors of opinion, and the persecuting spirit to which an ill-informed and mistaking conscience had led him.

The Jews were greatly offended by the conversion of Saul, and by his becoming a preacher of the Christian religion; and “they took counsel to kill him.” He escaped however and went to the apostles at Jerusalem, and taught there; but his life having been in peril in that city, he went to Cæsarea, and afterwards to his native place, Tarsus.

I find nothing requiring further notice till the 10th chapter, which contains an account of the first preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles by Peter, who had been directed by a vision to go to the house of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, for that purpose. Peter makes the following remarks, vv. 28, 29: “Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?” Cornelius having informed Peter why he had sent for him, Peter goes on to say, vv. 34–43: “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, I

say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judæa, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins."

I have to offer the following remarks on this address of the apostle Peter. In the first place we have distinctly his authority that in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness is accepted of him, in direct opposition to an opinion very extensively held among Christians, that the favour of the Almighty in the world to come will be confined to those only who are believers in the Christian religion. Cornelius was a Roman, and certainly was not a Christian at the commencement of the transactions to which we have been directing our attention. He is, however, described as a devout man, one that feared God with all his house, and gave much alms to the poor, and prayed to God alway. He was a truly pious and good man, and, although unacquainted

with Divine revelation, was fully prepared by his honest character to receive it when presented with such assurance of its truth as the case required. An angel is said to have appeared to him, and to have declared that his prayers and his alms had come up for a memorial before God. Peter is then divinely instructed to go to Cornelius, and the discourse quoted above ensues. In no part of the New Testament do I find anything inconsistent with the declaration of Peter which has been just mentioned*. We also find Peter saying in this discourse, what indeed is the uniform doctrine of the New Testament, that the power exercised by Christ on earth was derived from God, "for God was with him;" that it was God who raised him from the dead; that the apostles were appointed to be the witnesses of his resurrection; that they were commanded to preach to the people that Jesus was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead; and that the prophets had testified that through his name whoever believed in him should receive remission of sins. Such was the doctrine first preached to the Gentiles by the most eminent of the apostles; and although the peculiar office of apostle to the Gentiles was afterwards delivered to the hands of another, we shall find the same doctrine uniformly taught by that highly gifted and most distinguished person.

And now as to Peter himself: he was a Jew, and there is no reason to think that he was less influenced by the peculiar feelings and prejudices of the Jews than his fellow countrymen in general. He informs us that, previously to his vision, he had held it unlaw-

* See some observations on Mark xvi. 16, *ante* pp. 79, 80.

ful for a Jew to keep company with one of another nation. Indeed, so strongly was he imbued with the exclusive spirit of his nation, as to be influenced by it to a certain extent on a subsequent occasion. St. Paul tells us, "when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For, before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles; but when they were come, he withdrew, and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?"* With so much of the exclusive feeling of the Jews, and of their aversion to mix with other nations, what could have induced Peter to visit and convert Cornelius but a firm belief that he was directed to do so by a Divine vision? There seems no possible reason to doubt the sincerity of this belief, when it thus constrained him to act against his former feelings and convictions. His subsequent relapse at Antioch is quite in keeping with what we know of his character. He was evidently of a sanguine temperament; he was always ready to take a forward part, but was by no means remarkable for tenacity of purpose. The first to engage in an enterprise, his heart often failed him in pursuing it: witness his attempt to walk on the sea, and his denial and desertion of his Master.

* Gal. ii. 11-14.

One thing is abundantly clear; that no friend of Christianity could possibly have forged the account of Peter's conduct at Antioch. Nothing could be more unseemly than an open dispute between the leading apostle of the Jews, and him who was taking the like part among the Gentiles. I shall endeavour to show hereafter that we have satisfactory proof that the epistles usually ascribed to St. Paul were actually written by him. Assuming for the present that he was the author of that to the Galatians, it is impossible to imagine that his dispute with Peter is a mere fiction, unless we were to suppose him actually insane; but when we come to examine his epistles, we shall find, notwithstanding the difficulty and obscurity of some of them, the clearest indications of a sound and vigorous understanding.

Nothing which tends particularly to throw light on the teaching of the apostles and other instructors of the infant Christian Church occurs till we come to the mission of Paul and Barnabas. The following texts are taken from an address of St. Paul delivered at Antioch in Pisidia. Speaking of Jesus, he says: "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."* What this justification is we shall have to consider when the epistles of St. Paul are brought before us. In the next chapter we find a text which throws some light on the constitution of the early Christian church: "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed

* Acts xiii. 38, 39.

with fasting, they commended them to God on whom they believed.”* Passing over the proceedings at Jerusalem respecting the Gentile Christians, which I have already fully gone into, I have to notice a remarkable incident, which is derogatory to the parties concerned; and on that very account, must be held by all candid inquirers to have a strong internal mark of authenticity. This is no other than a violent dispute between Paul and Barnabas, who had been hitherto associated together in the preaching of the gospel; and which terminated in their separation: “The contention was so sharp between them that they departed asunder one from the other.”† That Luke, the companion and friend of Paul, should have made this statement if the fact had not actually occurred, is so incredible that no one can possibly believe it. Here then is another mark of the authenticity of the book of Acts.

We have after this an account of Paul and Silas having been beaten and imprisoned; and of the keeper of the prison having been alarmed by an earthquake, by which the prison doors had been opened, and his attempting to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had fled. “But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm; for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spoke unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the

* Acts xiv. 23.

† Acts xv. 39.

same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his house, straightway*.” Salvation is here promised, if they believe in Jesus Christ; but the attentive reader will observe that the historian adds, that they (Paul and Silas) spoke unto them the word of the Lord. What could this word be but the commandments of our Lord to his disciples to the practice of piety and virtue as essential for procuring the favour of God? Neither here nor elsewhere does the great apostle of the Gentiles (as I hope to show hereafter) teach that a mere belief in Christ, unaccompanied by obedience to his commands, will find acceptance with God. If he had taught such a doctrine, it would have been in direct opposition to that of his Master; and would yield a conclusive proof that he was no real apostle. I have, however, the firmest conviction that there is no inconsistency between the teaching of Jesus Christ and that of his apostle Paul.

After this we have honourable mention of the Bereans: “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so†.” The Scriptures here mentioned must have been the Old Testament, as the New was not then in existence. If the number of those who now search the Scriptures daily for the purpose of discovering what it is they really teach, could be ascertained, I fear we should suffer greatly in comparison with these noble Bereans. The time, however, I trust, is advancing, though slowly, when the New Testament will be more studied and better understood than it is at present. The cause of free

* Acts xvi. 32-33.

† Acts xvii. 11.

inquiry in religion is making progress, and will assuredly in the end put aside all the vain dogmas and fancies of men which shall be found inconsistent with the teaching of Jesus Christ and his apostles.

Paul next visits Athens. The inhabitants of that celebrated city seem to have borne a strong resemblance to not a few in England in our own day, "For they spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing*." Paul made a remarkable speech at Athens, which, after he had reproved the Athenians in the gentlest way for their idolatry, ends thus: "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead†." When the apostle told the Athenians that God would judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ, I cannot understand in what other sense he could have used these words but to express that the condition of men in the next world would be the consequence of their conduct and character in this; and this is uniformly the doctrine of the New Testament, whatever pretended orthodoxy may have said to the contrary.

After this Paul taught at Ephesus, where his preaching gave occasion to a remarkable tumult. The apostle remained at Ephesus two years. After visiting other places, he went on his way to Jerusalem, intending to be present at the day of Pentecost; and on that account determining to sail by Ephesus, with-

* Acts xvii. 21.

† Acts xvii. 30, 31.

out going there. He then sent from Miletus to Ephesus for the elders of the church. When they arrived, he addressed them in a pious and affectionate discourse; which concludes with the following remarkable passage: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood*." This is a very important text, and, taken in conjunction with what precedes, it casts great light, and, indeed, appears to me perfectly conclusive, on a question which has been much contested in the Christian church; whether in the first age elders or presbyters were the same or a different order from bishops. The great body of episcopalians hold that bishops were from the first a superior class, having authority over the presbyters. Those who have adopted either a presbyterian or a congregational form in their churches have uniformly maintained that bishops and presbyters are only different names for the same office. The word bishop is expressed in the Greek Testament by a word which means inspector, or overseer. Elder is a literal translation of a Greek word, and it is much to be regretted that any other term has ever been employed to designate the office. Unfortunately the word presbyter was afterwards introduced in its place, and yielded in its turn to the designation priest, a term entirely unknown to the New Testament as the denomination of a Christian teacher; and the epi-

* Acts xx. 28. It seems that the word Lord should be read in this text instead of God. This reading is adopted in Griesbach's edition of the New Testament, and appears to be so on satisfactory grounds.

scopalians—by far the larger portion of the Christian world—are to this day taught that three distinct orders of Christian ministers, bishops, priests, and deacons, were appointed at the first promulgation of the Christian religion; or at least in the lifetime of the apostles. Many too consider that the bishops are the legitimate successors of the apostles; and that an apostolical succession has been continued from the first age to the present time. The text referred to clearly relates to the elders who had come from Ephesus to Miletus, and to whom the apostle addresses his discourse. They are therefore the same persons who are called overseers in the 28th verse. Elders and overseers then mean the same individuals, and are two terms signifying the same office in the Christian church. But the word here translated overseers is in every other text of the New Testament translated bishops. Why then did not our translators render it by the same word here? The answer is plain enough. That translation would have afforded an argument, to my mind irresistible, that elders and bishops were originally the same. We shall find important confirmatory evidence of this in some of St. Paul's epistles. The early constitution of the Christian church, so far as the New Testament affords us information,—and we have none from any other quarter,—appears to have been this. Elders, who are sometimes called bishops, were appointed by the apostles, either with or without the concurrence of the members of each particular church or congregation, to whom was committed the general management of the affairs of the church. From the texts which have been already quoted to show that the

apostles were very anxious not to exercise undue authority over the disciples, I am inclined to think that the congregations were consulted, and that the appointment of elders was made with their concurrence ; but I do not find the New Testament explicit on this head. From what passed on the nomination of the deacons, and at the meeting respecting the Gentile Christians, narrated in the 15th chapter of Acts, and which has already been the subject of attention and remark, it seems probable that the whole congregation was called on to act on occasions of importance.

Besides the elders, and probably in subordination to them, persons who are called deacons and deaconesses, both men and women, had committed to them the charge of the poor.

It seems highly probable that at a very early period some one of the elders was selected to preside at their meetings, and that the term bishop naturally enough, considering its etymology, then began to be applied exclusively to him. The necessity of a president or chairman is soon felt in all societies ; and I see no reason to think that the bishop, as distinguished from the general body of the elders, was at first anything more than this. This distinction would of course be given to some person among the elders superior in station, or ability, to the rest, and it is quite in the ordinary course of human affairs that the authority thus confined should go on extending itself. The increase of numbers in the church too would infallibly lead to increased power in the bishop. It is foreign to the purpose of this portion of my work to carry my

remarks on this subject any further. I shall have much more to say hereafter respecting the teachers of the early church. I will only add here, that we should be mistaken if we were to suppose, that because the individuals who, under the apostles, exercised the highest authority in the Christian church are often called elders, they were always persons of advanced age. That they were generally so is probable; but it can scarcely be thought that in their selection no regard would be had to station, property and education. Probably all these things were considered; and we know that Timothy, who was a young man, was entrusted with high authority by the apostle Paul.

With respect to what is called apostolical succession, that term may be very properly used if it be only meant to express that there has been a regular succession of teachers in the church from the time of the apostles to the present day. If, however, it be contended that the bishops of the present time are in legitimate possession of all the powers conferred by Christ on the apostles, I find nothing in the New Testament which supports that opinion. It seems that the apostles never increased their original number of twelve. Matthias was appointed to succeed Judas Iscariot, and Paul's apostleship probably did not commence till after the death of James. Lardner has, I think, satisfactorily shown that Barnabas was not an apostle in the strict and peculiar sense of that term, although the appellation is once applied to him. The original meaning of the word apostle is, one sent on a particular mission; and in that sense it is sometimes applied to those who were

not in the number of the twelve. I can see no ground from the New Testament to think that any person was appointed to the apostolical office after St. Paul.

I shall now shortly advert to the accounts contained in the Acts of the persecution of the apostles, in addition to those which have been already mentioned. We are informed that Herod slew the apostle James, the brother of John, with the sword; and that he imprisoned Peter, who was delivered by an angel. We find that at Lystra Paul was stoned and left for dead; that he and Silas were sent away by night from Thessalonica on account of the violence of the people against them; that the Bereans, whose previous good dispositions have been already noticed, were stirred up against them, which occasioned Paul to be sent away; that in Corinth the Jews brought him before the judgment-seat of Gallio, who wisely refused to interfere in a matter concerning religion, and restored him to freedom; and that he was exposed to great danger in a disturbance at Ephesus. In his address to the Ephesians, which has been already mentioned for another purpose, Paul says: "And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there; save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God*."

After this we find the apostle at Cæsarea, where a

* Acts xx. 22-24.

person named Agabus foretells that Paul will be bound at Jerusalem, and delivered to the Gentiles ; which induces his followers to endeavour to dissuade him from going to Jerusalem. "Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus*." He then goes to Jerusalem, and in a tumult there is bound with two chains and imprisoned, and only escapes being examined by scourging, on telling them that he is a Roman citizen, and therefore not liable to be put to torture. He is then examined by the Jewish council and again committed to prison. It is afterwards communicated to the Roman officer that there is a conspiracy to take Paul's life ; and he is sent to Cæsarea, where Felix the Roman proconsul resided. An accusation is then brought against him before Felix, who detains him two years in prison without deciding on his case ; and on giving up his government, he leaves Paul still in prison. After this he is examined before Festus the new Roman governor, and also before Agrippa, at that time king of Judæa. Paul then appeals to the Roman emperor, and is sent to Italy ; where he arrives after a tempestuous voyage, and after having suffered shipwreck. On his arrival at Rome, he is not treated, probably as being a Roman citizen, with any unnecessary severity, being suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him. The book of Acts concludes thus : "And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him ; preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the

* Acts xxi. 13.

Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.”

We have now gone through the book commonly called the Acts of the Apostles. The title may be thought not to have been happily chosen ; for it is far from being a history of the proceedings of all the apostles, and indeed is chiefly confined to two, Peter and Paul, who, however, appear to have been the most distinguished among the apostles. I cannot think that any candid person can rise from an attentive perusal of this invaluable record without a conviction that the apostles acted a sincere and honest part ; that they firmly believed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, in his divine commission, and in their own as derived from him. There is in this book no indication of the apostles having been actuated by motives of ambition. They assume nowhere any more authority than was necessary for the promulgation of the religion which they believed themselves sent to teach. Peter, the first of the apostles, yields precedence to James, and, in his epistle, expressly warns the teachers of the Christian religion not to assume any undue authority over their brethren. The apostles are imprisoned and beaten, and charged by the Jewish authorities to forbear preaching in the name of Jesus ; but threatenings and persecutions fail entirely to make them renounce the course of life which, in obedience to the instructions of their Master, they had chosen. When a question arises respecting the Gentile converts, and is brought before the apostles at Jerusalem, the whole body of Christians is called together to consult upon it, and the answer given to the inquiry is by the apostles, the elders, and

the brethren. Very soon after the resurrection, the apostles proceed to appoint a successor to the traitor Judas ; and we shall see hereafter that St. Paul claimed to be an apostle by the immediate appointment of Jesus Christ. This was probably after the death of James ; and if so, the apostles never exceeded their original number twelve. No part of the New Testament, as far as I can discover, shows, or tends to show, that the apostolical authority was transferred to any other persons whatever. With the death of the original eleven, and the two afterwards added to their number, the office expired. It had served its double purpose ; first, that of affording witnesses, among those who had been well acquainted with his person, of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ; and, secondly, of providing a certain number of individuals, endowed with superior knowledge and wisdom by divine revelation and appointment for the promulgation of the Christian religion in the world.

With respect to the discipline and government of the early Christian churches, I see no reason to doubt that it was strictly congregational. Finding as we do in the account of the question respecting the Gentiles, that the brethren, which can scarcely admit of any other meaning than all the members of the church, were called on to act and decide, although the apostles themselves were present, I cannot conceive that a less degree of authority was exercised by the other Christian churches. That a deference was paid to the apostles, such as no subsequent teachers have any right to require, cannot be doubted ; but even their authority is not clearly defined ; and we have already seen that they disclaimed all power be-

yond what was required for the purpose of their mission. The distinction between clergy (as we now understand the term as denoting a class of persons withdrawn from secular pursuits, and wholly devoted to the ministerial office) and laity was quite unknown. We find St. Paul, the most laborious of the apostles, supporting himself by the labour of his hands*. The introduction of clergy at a subsequent period into the Christian church may have been proper, and was perhaps even essential to the support of Christianity in the world; but the establishment of their order rests on no direct divine appointment, and must be justified and defended on the satisfactory ground of their usefulness in the church. Even at the present day the Quakers and the Sandemanians have no clergy; and no candid person will deny their sincerity as professing Christians. It may, however, well be doubted, whether Christianity, with all the bad passions of man arrayed against it, could have subsisted in the world without the aid of men, separated from secular pursuits, and devoted exclusively to instruction, to exhortation, to the supply of the wants, physical, moral and religious, of those who are in need, to the consolation of the afflicted, to the reproof of the wicked, and to the support and encouragement of the sinner who desires to turn from his evil ways and to do that which is lawful and right. To a clergy so employed, the regard and respect of all whose good opinion is worth having, can never be wanting. It is only when they suffer themselves to be seduced from their proper line of duty by the pomp and pleasures of the world, by avarice, or by ambi-

* Acts xviii. 2, 3.

tion, that they lose the high estimation to which the conscientious discharge of their sacred functions would have entitled them.

The doctrines taught by the apostles in the Acts are perfectly consistent with those of our Saviour in the gospels. All good is ascribed in the first instance to God; and Jesus Christ, whom God raised from the dead, is always regarded as the instrument in the hands of God of spiritual blessings to man. The doctrine of a future state is inculcated with apostolic authority; and piety and virtue are insisted on as necessary preparations for the happiness of the world to come. Faith in Christ is the condition of being received into the new covenant made through him by God with man; and obedience to the laws of God is essential to the participation of the blessings of the heavenly state which is to follow this life. Both in the Gospel and in the Acts we find the most cheering and encouraging views of the goodness and mercy of God, who knoweth our infirmities, and remembereth whereof we are made. If we draw our religious opinions from these sacred books, we shall be satisfied that if we really and seriously desire and strive to serve God to the best of our power, we shall find Him not extreme to mark what is done amiss; full of mercy towards his sinful creatures, and desirous that the sinner should turn from his evil ways and live.

We are now about to commence an examination of a very important part of the New Testament—the Epistles. Thirteen of these epistles are universally ascribed to the apostle Paul, as is the epistle to the Hebrews, in the common version of the Scriptures

used in this country, although many well-informed persons think they have reason to deny, or at least to doubt, the apostle being the author of this epistle. All the other epistles are usually thought to have been written by apostles; and with respect to the far larger part of them, the judgment of the Christian church appears to have been almost unanimous.

We have seen that the lessons of practical religion given by the apostles at the first preaching of Christianity differ in no respect from those of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; but if we are to believe a host of divines, among whom I fear we must reckon most of the early reformers, St. Paul taught his disciples a far different doctrine. According to these writers, the benefits of Christianity are to be obtained solely by faith in Jesus Christ, and by reliance on his merits. The more sober of these divines indeed inculcate piety and virtue, and represent them as the natural and necessary results of a true and lively faith; but still they consider these good works, as they are generally termed, of no efficacy whatever in procuring our salvation. The zeal with which the fathers of the Reformation supported this doctrine apparently arose from their detestation of the Popish dogma respecting the merits of the saints, and the pernicious effects which resulted from it. That St. Paul never taught it, I hope to be able to show in the following pages. If he had preached such a doctrine, so directly opposite to what is taught by Christ in the gospels, and by his disciples in the Acts, I do not think all the external arguments in favour of the apostleship of Paul could have prevailed with a rational inquirer to admit its validity.

The error of this system seems to have arisen from confounding the cause with the conditions of our salvation. Salvation, that is, forgiveness of sins and participation in the felicity of the world to come, is the free gift of God ; and to assert that by anything we do or can do, by a life even of perfect obedience to the will of God, we should be entitled to claim the inestimable blessing of eternal felicity as a matter of right, would be in the highest degree absurd. The conditions of salvation, however, is quite a different matter ; and the whole tenor of the New Testament shows that unless we lead lives in the main conformable to the laws of God, we can entertain no rational hope of salvation. Man by the very law of his being can attain happiness only by the practice of piety and virtue. The wicked, the selfish, the sensual in this world have by their lives disqualified themselves from the enjoyment of those beatitudes in the world to come, which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and which it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive.

Misconceptions of St. Paul's epistles arose early in the Christian church. In writing of him St. Peter says, " In which (his epistles) are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction*." If then St. Peter found things hard to be understood in these writings, how can we expect fully to understand them ?

The epistles of Paul were written in a remote age, and in a state of society greatly differing from the condition of the world in our own times. They are

* 2 Peter, iii. 16.

addressed either to particular churches or to individuals, and refer to a variety of circumstances with which we are unacquainted. The peculiarities of the Jewish people, and the personal character of the apostle, combine greatly to enhance the difficulty of understanding these compositions. The Jews had for many ages considered themselves the people of God, and had looked with contempt on other nations. They had anticipated a conquering and triumphant Messiah who would restore the kingdom of David, and re-establish it with power and splendour far surpassing what it had attained at its most prosperous period. He was to free them from the yoke of the Romans, at that time the masters of the civilized world. The idea of the Gentiles ever being placed in a state of favour with God equal to themselves, had never entered the Jewish mind. By the nation at large Jesus was rejected when they found that he did not intend to set up a temporal kingdom. That he would do so was the hope of his disciples even after his resurrection. Engrossed by their ideas of a king and a conqueror, the Jews were totally incapable of appreciating the character of Jesus, and of perceiving that the gentlest and humblest of men was, at the same time, the most dignified and exalted. We have seen how far his own chosen disciples were from fully understanding and imitating his virtues, and the generality of his followers no doubt fell far short of the apostles. When, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, converts were made among the Jews, it does not appear that they entertained the least expectation that the Gentiles were to be admitted to the same privileges with themselves; and when the latter

became Christians, the Jews expected that the Gentiles would conform to the laws of Moses. Against these inveterate prejudices the apostle Paul had to contend; and the object of a large portion of his epistles is to assert and defend the privileges of the Gentiles, of whom he was peculiarly the apostle; their independence of the Jewish law; and their equal participation with the Jews in all the blessings of the Christian dispensation.

St. Paul was in every respect a great man. All the intellectual and moral elements of his character were on a large scale. Accurate judgment and vigorous power of reasoning were united in him with a most fertile imagination and the intensest feeling. Fervent piety to his Maker was combined with benevolence in the highest degree to his fellow-creatures. Not the slightest indication of an approach to selfishness is to be found in any part of his history or his writings. Conscience reigned supreme throughout his whole life; as much in the persecutor Saul as in the zealous and indefatigable apostle Paul. He was led to persecute the Christians, not by those malignant feelings which we are perhaps too apt to impute to persecutors, but by a mistaken sense of duty. His moral and religious elevation gives a tinge to all his writings, and carries him on in a strain of imaginative and impassioned eloquence, which makes it often difficult even for an attentive reader to follow the course of his reasoning, and to perceive the connexion of the different parts of his discourse. I must introduce here the admirable remarks of Locke on the epistles of St. Paul. "I continued," he says, "to read the same epistle over and over, and over

again, till I came to discover, as appeared to me what was the drift and aim of it, and by what steps and arguments St. Paul prosecuted his purpose. I remembered that St. Paul was miraculously called to the ministry of the gospel, and declared to be a chosen vessel; that he had the whole doctrine of the gospel from God by immediate revelation, and was appointed to be the apostle of the *Gentiles* for the propagating of it in the heathen world. This was enough to persuade me, that he was not a man of loose and shattered parts, incapable to argue, and unfit to convince those he had to deal with. God knows how to choose fit instruments for the business he employs them in. A large stock of Jewish learning he had taken in at the feet of Gamaliel, and for his information in Christian knowledge, and the mysteries and depths of the dispensation of grace by Jesus Christ, God himself had condescended to be his instructor and teacher. The light of the gospel he had received from the Fountain and Father of light himself, who, I concluded, had not furnished him in this extraordinary manner, if all this plentiful stock of learning and illumination had been in danger to have been lost, or proved useless, in a jumbled and confused head; nor have laid up such a store of admirable and useful knowledge in a man, who for want of method and order, clearness of perception, or pertinency in discourse, could not draw it out into use with the greatest advantages of force and coherence. That he knew how to prosecute his purpose with strength of argument and close reasoning, without incoherent sallies, or the intermixing of things foreign to his business, was evident to me from several

speeches of his recorded in the Acts ; and it was hard to think, that a man, that could talk with so much consistency and clearness of conviction, should not be able to write without confusion, inextricable obscurity, and perpetual rambling. The force, order and perspicuity of these discourses could not be denied to be very visible. How then came it that the like was thought much wanting in his epistles ? And of this there appeared to me this plain reason : the particularities of the history in which these speeches are inserted, show St. Paul's end in speaking, which being seen, casts a light on the whole, and shows the pertinency of all that he says. But his epistles not being so circumstantiated, there being no concurring history that plainly declares the disposition St. Paul was in, what the actions, expectations, or demands of those to whom he writ, required him to speak to, we are nowhere told. All this, and a great deal more, necessary to guide us into the true meaning of the epistles, is to be had only from the epistles themselves, and to be gathered from thence with stubborn attention, and more than common application*."

I shall now proceed to a review of such parts of St. Paul's epistles as seem to me clearly to show that the doctrine of that apostle was precisely the same as that which we find inculcated in the Gospels and Acts ; and that he uniformly taught that obedience to the laws of God in this world is the condition of his favour in the next ; and, consequently, that there is no foundation for the notion that salvation can be obtained merely by faith in Jesus Christ, and reliance

* Locke's Preface to a Paraphrase on the Epistles of St. Paul.

on his merits. By far the most difficult to be understood of these epistles is that to the Romans. After long study of it, with the assistance of many commentators, I feel by no means fully satisfied that I clearly perceive its general object; and many particular texts I cannot at all understand. This, however, is nothing extraordinary. There are, no doubt, many allusions to facts and circumstances well known to those to whom the epistle was addressed, and which enabled them to understand it. As these matters are unknown to us, we can have no concern with them; and need not disquiet ourselves about them. Our business is to avail ourselves of all the aid the apostle affords us to strengthen our faith, and to promote our advance in the path of holiness and goodness. "The wrath of God," says the apostle, "is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness*." In this passage the apostle declares that some hold the truth in unrighteousness. The faith therefore of these persons was right, but their conduct was evil; and we are informed that the wrath of God is revealed against them. Much of the second chapter is directed against the presumption of the Jews, and their assumption of superiority over the Gentiles. St. Paul declares, that God will render to every man according to his deeds; and, that "when the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves†."

The Old Testament (more properly Covenant) re-

* Rom. i. 18.

† Rom. ii. 14.

presents the Jewish nation in a peculiar relation to the Deity by having received an express promise of his favour; but this promise was on condition that they obeyed his laws. The New Covenant, in the like manner, makes Christians partakers of the promise of God both as to their welfare in this world, and as to their becoming partakers of everlasting felicity in the world to come; and the apostle informs us that we are justified freely by the grace of God through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; and therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law: by all which I understand that the Christian is admitted into a covenant relation with God by faith without submitting himself to the law of Moses. But the whole course of the teaching of our Saviour, of the apostles as recorded in the book of Acts, of St. Paul himself, as I have already shown in part, and shall show more at length hereafter, and also of the authors of the other epistles contained in the New Testament, combine to show that the eternal law of righteousness is binding on Christians, and that they cannot justly entertain the hope of salvation unless they conform their lives to it. "Do we," says the apostle, "then make void the law through faith? yea, we establish the law*." The sense of the last text is, I think, clearly expressed in the following paraphrase: "But let not any imagine, I set law aside, or render obedience unnecessary, by affirming, mankind have a title to the blessings of God's covenant only by faith, or a dependence upon grace. On the contrary, the gospel, which I preach, establishes

* Rom. iii. 24, 28, 31.

the eternal obligations of law, or the rule of right action, and brings us under the strongest engagements to the obedience of it*.”

The main drift of the fourth chapter is, I think, that as Abraham was admitted by faith to the favour of God before the establishment of the Mosaic law, and even before the rite of circumcision, to which he afterwards submitted, so the Gentiles are by faith made partakers of the blessings and promise of the gospel without subjecting themselves to the law of Moses. “It seems very clear to me,” says Taylor, “that the justification the apostle is contending for, in the five first chapters of this epistle, is the calling of the Gentiles, and their being admitted, upon faith, into the peculiar family and kingdom of God †.”

In the beginning of the sixth chapter the apostle rejects with indignation the suggestion that we should continue in sin that grace might abound. “How shall we,” he says, “that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” The eighth chapter begins thus: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” What can walking after the Spirit mean but leading holy and virtuous lives? The 13th verse of the same chapter runs thus: “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” The epistle to the end of the 11th chapter abounds in difficulties; and many parts of it I feel myself quite unable to understand. The remaining chapters are chiefly filled with exhortations

* Taylor on the Romans.

† Key to the Apostolic Writings, chap. xvii.

to a pure and holy life, which the apostle could not have pressed so earnestly if he had laid so little stress on what is commonly called good works, as many of those have done who profess to take their doctrines from him. On looking back on the whole of this most difficult, but, on many accounts, highly important epistle, I rise with the firmest conviction that nothing contained in it proves, or tends to prove, that, in the opinion of the apostle, obedience to the commandments of God by a religious and holy life is not an essential condition of our attaining that state of felicity in the world to come which is promised in the gospel to the faithful disciples of Christ.

The first epistle to the Corinthians is much less hard to be understood than that to the Romans; but it has, nevertheless, considerable difficulties. A large portion of it relates to the reprehensible conduct of the Corinthians in several particulars, and to that of some teacher who had set himself up in opposition to the apostle; facts with which we are imperfectly acquainted, having no other knowledge of them than what is afforded by the epistle itself. St. Paul gives the following affecting account of the labours and sufferings of the apostles: "Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; and labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the earth, and are the offscouring of all things to this day*." As this epistle was written to the Corinthians, with whom he had spent a considerable time,

* 1 Corinthians, iv. 11-13.

and to whom his course of life must have been well known, I can see no possible reason to doubt the truth of the representation here made by the apostle. These labours and sufferings then had really been undergone by himself and other early teachers of the gospel; and for what purpose had they encountered them? We can easily account for their conduct by admitting the truth of what they uniformly asserted—that they believed themselves to be acting by Divine authority. I can conceive nothing short of this which could have induced them to practise such a mode of life, or could have afforded them the slightest hope of success in their attempt to set up a new religion in the world in direct opposition to that of the heathen, and to the most cherished feelings and prejudices of the nation to which they belonged. In a subsequent passage in the epistle we find these words: “Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God*.” Can any language be plainer than this to show that abstaining from the vices enumerated is essential to a participation in the blessings of the future world? It may indeed be doubted whether the kingdom of heaven means a future state of felicity, or denotes here, as it certainly does in many passages of the gospels, the kingdom of Christ on earth, that is his religion. But supposing this latter to be the meaning of the text, it comes to the same thing, for the kingdom of Christ in this world is preparatory to the happiness of that which

* 1 Corinthians, vi. 9, 10.

is to come; and the joys of heaven are promised to those only who receive the religion of Jesus here. The thirteenth chapter of this epistle is filled with the praises of what is in our common translation called charity. I know of no English word which will precisely express the meaning of the original. "Love," as has been justly said by a late translator of the New Testament, "is the more correct, and now the usual translation; but on the whole it does not seem worth while to disturb the old word, to which usage has now given an understood application. Love almost equally requires to be understood somewhat in a special sense." I will add to these observations, that the word benevolence, the proper signification of which is willing the good of others, is by no means strong enough to express the meaning of the apostle; which indicates a strong feeling of the heart, by which we regard the happiness of others as our own. The charity of St. Paul I understand to be the loving of our neighbours as ourselves, which our Saviour himself calls the second great commandment; making it inferior only to the love of God. The more deeply we investigate our moral nature, the more fully satisfied we shall become that the love of God and of our fellow-creatures are the highest principles of human character. The chapter concludes as follows: "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." Surely this is a distinct declaration by the apostle of that branch of religion which consists in the love of our neighbour being superior even to faith in the Christian religion.

In the second epistle to the Corinthians we find the following passage: "We must all appear before the

judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad*.” The following passage, though not relating to our immediate object, is of great importance: “All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed to us the word of reconciliation†.” Divines of a certain class are fond of talking of God being reconciled to us; but this is language nowhere contained in the New Testament; which shows, in many passages, that the object of Christ’s coming into the world was, not to reconcile God to us, but to reconcile us to him; that is, to reclaim us from estrangement from God by disobedience to his commandments, and to render us, by lives of purity, piety and virtue, fit recipients of his bounty. When we reflect that we all are the creatures of God, it seems perfectly inconsistent with our conceptions of his perfections that he can ever be estranged from the work of his hands. But although the Deity is never estranged from men, they are always alienated from him when they transgress his laws. The perfection of our moral nature consists in piety and virtue; and by those alone can we attain true happiness. The nature of things must be altered before a vicious and wicked man can be fitted for the joys of heaven. To attain the happiness of a future state, we must practise piety and virtue here; and this is precisely what is meant by our being reconciled to God.

* 2 Cor. v. 10.

† 2 Cor. v. 18, 19.

In the epistle to the Galatians we find the following passages: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God*." "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap everlasting life†." In none of the writings of Paul is stronger language used respecting faith than in this to the Galatians; but the texts just quoted clearly show that the apostle never could have intended to teach that faith, without a good life, would entitle any one to salvation.

In the epistle to the Ephesians St. Paul speaks of the mystery hidden in former times; "that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel‡." This doctrine, which was highly unpalatable to the Jews, the apostle always enforces with great zeal; and it is explanatory of much in his epistles respecting faith. He afterwards exhorts the Ephesians, "to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of spirit in the bond of peace§." After-

* Gal. v. 19-21.

† Gal. vi. 7, 8.

‡ Ephes. iii. 4-6.

§ Ephes. iv. 1-3.

wards he instructs them as follows: "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath; neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake" (or as it should have been translated, in or by Christ) "hath forgiven you*." In the next chapter we meet with the following verses: "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience; be ye not therefore partakers with them†." Surely the words which I have quoted from this and the preceding epistles are of awful im-

* Ephes. iv. 22-32.

† Ephes. v. 5-7.

port, and calculated to alarm to the utmost a careless and sinful world. I do not feel it necessary to bring any farther proof that the teaching of St. Paul is perfectly consistent with that of his and our Lord and Master Jesus Christ. The doctrine of the New Testament throughout is, that salvation is the free gift of God by Jesus Christ ; but that leading a religious and virtuous life is the essential condition of our participation in that inestimable blessing. Similar passages to those which I have quoted may be found in the other epistles of the apostle, which I feel it quite unnecessary to quote.

In referring to them, I shall chiefly confine myself to those texts which throw light on the constitution of the early Christian church. The epistle to the Philippians begins as follows : “ Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.” Whitby, himself an Episcopalian, has clearly shown, in a learned note, that the word bishops in this text must be understood to be applied to the individuals who are called elders. We have already had reason to believe that the same class of persons were designated by the two words, bishops and elders ; and I can discover nothing in the New Testament to indicate that this was not always the case. I have already admitted that a distinction was made at a very early period, and that precedence was given to the bishop above the other elders ; but I find nothing to lead me to think that he was considered in any other light than as the presiding elder. When the change took place, one bishop only was appointed to each church.

The plural word "bishops" being used in this text clearly shows that no such change had taken place at the time when this epistle was written; and it can properly be understood to mean nothing more than elders.

The epistles to Timothy and Titus have generally been considered the strongholds of those who contend for the establishment of episcopacy in apostolic times. I will proceed to consider whether they afford any authority for that opinion. It appears from the commencement of the first epistle to Timothy that St. Paul left him at Ephesus, "that," says the epistle, "thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying, which is in faith." From this text nothing can be gathered, but that Timothy was left for the purpose of preventing the dissemination of unsound doctrine; there is nothing to show whether this mission of Timothy was intended to be temporary or permanent. It is a common opinion that Timothy was the first bishop of Ephesus; and this may be true; but the text in question affords no proof of it. The third chapter begins thus: "This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good thing." The apostle goes on to describe what a bishop ought to be; and he then shows what ought to be the character of deacons, and their wives, as our translation has it; but, in the opinion of many able and learned commentators, both ancient and modern, deaconesses, who appear to have held offices in the Church similar to those of the deacons. The only reason that I can perceive for interpreting the word

bishop to mean any more than elders, to whom I have shown that term is applicable, is, that the singular number is used. But this does not seem to determine the meaning of the text. If there had been three degrees of teachers in the Church at that time in Ephesus—a bishop, elders or presbyters, and deacons,—it seems in the highest degree improbable that St. Paul should have given directions as to the characters of the bishops and deacons ; and have entirely omitted the elders. Their office was certainly more important than that of the deacons ; and at least equal qualification of character must have been required of them. And so it was if we suppose bishop and elder to be only designations of the same individuals. But it may perhaps be supposed that the two following texts lend a support to the notion, that a bishop was superior to an elder : “ Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses*.” The last verse certainly shows that the apostle deemed Timothy to have some authority over the elders ; for otherwise it would be useless and absurd for him to receive an accusation against them. Whatever power he possessed, however, was committed to him personally by the apostle ; and there is not a word in the epistle to show that a like authority was to be transmitted to his successor, or that it was intended that he should have a successor. The notions that a bishopric was founded on this occasion in Ephesus, that Timothy was the first bishop, and that a regular succession of individuals were in time

* 1 Timothy, v. 17, 19.

to hold the same office, are totally void of any foundation in the epistle. It would be a strange interpretation of the third chapter, which mentions the qualifications of a bishop, to apply it to Timothy himself, who had been appointed to that office, and therefore must, in the apostle's estimation, have been possessed of the requisites for the office. I can see no room for a rational doubt that the instructions contained in the third chapter are to be referred to persons to be appointed at a time subsequent to the period when the epistle was written. I have said already that I see no improbability in Timothy having really been the first bishop of Ephesus ; but then a bishop in those days, I suspect, was very different in his functions from those who subsequently ruled the Church in that name. The elders in any large congregation of Christians would probably be considerable in point of numbers ; and it would be found necessary for the ordinary conduct of business, that some individual should act as president or chairman in their meetings. For this purpose some one distinguished by abilities, character or station, would naturally be elected ; and if he discharged the duties of his office to the satisfaction of his brethren, it is highly probable that the office would become permanent in his person ; and that on his death or removal another elder would be appointed to succeed him. If this were so, a name would evidently be required for the new office ; and as of the two words previously in use, bishop and elder, the former in its meaning imported authority, it would naturally be preferred as the title of him to whom the presidency was committed. I beg it may not be understood that

I assert this to have been the origin of episcopacy ; I only say that it seems probable that it was so. All which I am concerned with is, whether by the authority of the apostles, expressed in the New Testament, two separate orders of ministers in the Church were established under the names of bishops and elders. The first epistle to Timothy seems to me to afford no ground for that opinion.

In the second epistle to Timothy we find the following verse : “ The things which thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also*.” It would be difficult to produce a stronger instance of the *creative* faculty by which divines contrive to make something out of nothing, than in the interpretations which Whitby tells us have been given to this very plain text. “ That *deposition* (chap. i. 14) which I committed to thee, in the public assembly, at thine ordination, do thou also, in like manner, deposit with other faithful men, that the truth may be continued in an uninterrupted succession of such persons.” So Obadiah Walker. “ The things agreed on, and consented to by all the other apostles, do thou commit to able men, and appoint them as bishops of the several churches under thee.” So Dr. Hammond. Well does Whitby add, “ I think there is no foundation for all this in the text.” In spite of the reproof of honest Dr. Whitby to these makers of new scriptures, divines have gone on, and are going on vigorously in the same course, making additions to the Scriptures according to their own inclinations and

* 2 Timothy, ii. 2.

fancies. Happily the Scriptures afford satisfactory and abundant evidence to overturn all the wild imaginations of men.

The following passage is from the epistle to Titus :
“ For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldst set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city as I had appointed thee : if any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of riot, or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God ; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre ; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate ; holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers *.” I cannot conceive how anything short of a predetermination that bishops and elders were different can prevent any one from seeing that the word bishop in the 7th verse of the passage quoted above means one of the same order to which the term elders was applied in the 5th verse. I can discover nowhere in the New Testament the slightest ground for supposing that bishops were distinguished from elders in the time of the apostles, except in the way above mentioned.

I have no further remark to make on the undisputed epistles of St. Paul. From the extracts which have been made, and from their general tenor, it is to my mind perfectly clear that the apostle taught, as his Master had always done, that a religious and virtuous life is the essential condition of our being admitted

* Titus, i. 5-9.

to a state of happiness in the world to come. On the second point to which I have directed the attention of the reader, there appears no reason whatever to believe that the apostle either established or recognized an order of teachers called bishops of higher authority in the Church than the elders. Bishops and elders appear in his writings, as well as in his speech to the elders of Ephesus*, to have been merely different terms applied to the same individuals.

We are now led, in the course of our investigation, to a very remarkable production, the epistle to the Hebrews. In the version in common use in this country it is called the Epistle of Paul the apostle to the Hebrews. It is, however, well known that great doubts exist as to the apostle being really the author of the epistle; and that there has been much controversy on the subject. Arguments of great weight have been produced on both sides of the question, and those who, on studying the matter in dispute, come to the conclusion that St. Paul was probably the author of the epistle, can hardly attain such an unhesitating conviction as we yield to those epistles which bear the apostle's name, and which have in all ages of the Church without doubt or controversy been ascribed to him. Under this uncertainty I shall treat the epistle as an independent document, with whose author we are unacquainted; and examine its contents in order to discover whether or not it agrees on the points which we have been considering with what we find in the gospels and in the undisputed epistles of St. Paul. The epistle may be divided into two parts: the object of the first

* Acts, xx. 18.

appearing to be to assert the superiority of the Christian to the Jewish dispensation ; and the second, setting forth the excellence of faith, enforcing with great earnestness and eloquence the duties of life ; and holding out encouragement to Christians by examples drawn from the Old Testament history. The earlier part of the epistle ranks among the most obscure of the writings in the New Testament. When we consider that this epistle was written before the destruction of Jerusalem ; when the temple service with all the burdensome ceremonies of the Jewish ritual was still in existence, we can scarcely wonder that a work full of references to the forms and ceremonies of the Jewish religion, to which the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem, which took place within a few years of the writing of the epistle*, put an end, and with which our acquaintance is necessarily imperfect, should contain much which, at the present day, we are unable to understand. With these difficulties we have nothing to do here. I shall endeavour to show hereafter that Christians have often been unnecessarily alarmed on finding themselves unable to understand the obscurer parts of Scripture ; and that their ill-founded fears have been encouraged and exaggerated by those who have assumed an authority in the Christian Church to which they have no legitimate title ; and who have made religion subservient to their own ambition and interest. At present our business is to examine the epistle to the Hebrews for the purposes stated above. The passages to which I refer are as follows : “ For if we wilfully

* Lardner thinks it probable that the epistle was written A.D. 63. The destruction of Jerusalem was A.D. 70.

sin after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries ;” * “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.” † These texts clearly show that the author of the epistle held no other doctrine as to the necessity of a good life than what had been taught by Jesus and his apostles.

I shall mention two other texts which bear relation to the second part of our inquiry : “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God : whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation :” “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves : for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief : for that is unprofitable for you.” ‡ These texts are important as directing respect and obedience to be paid by Christians to their teachers. The situation of the instructors in the infant Christian Church differed in some important particulars from that of those who devote themselves to the duties of the ministry in our own days. The early teachers in general had probably received personal instructions from the apostles ; and were appointed by them, in concurrence with the respective congregations, to the ministerial office. A considerable time too must have elapsed before the writings which we call the New Testament became generally accessible. This could have been effected only by the tedious and laborious copying of manuscripts. The Christians therefore of those days must

* Heb. x. 26, 27. † Heb. xii. 14. ‡ Heb. xiii. 7, 17.

have looked almost exclusively to the oral instructions of their teachers ; and, of course, obedience to these instructions would be required of them. To set themselves against their teachers would be throwing off the only legitimate authority to which they were in a condition to refer. Notwithstanding, however, these differences, there is much in the position and circumstances of those who now exercise the Christian ministry to entitle them to the respect, and, to a considerable extent, to the obedience of their hearers. They are in general persons of much superior education to the far greater part of their congregations, and they are by profession devoted to the cause of religion. It is their proper business to lead the devotional services of the church ; to give the word of exhortation ; to alarm the guilty ; to console the afflicted ; to encourage the penitent. To them the indigent look for assistance, the sick and the dying for support and consolation. A life spent in these outward acts of religion can hardly fail to improve and elevate the inner man ; and to raise his character above that of those who are deeply engaged in the affairs of the world. I cannot doubt that the clergy of all denominations are in general superior in all that pertains to religion and morals to the laity. Nor can we reasonably hesitate to admit that the clergy are commonly far more acquainted with the Scriptures than the laity. Ignorance should in all cases yield to knowledge ; and it seems reasonable that on all points which the layman has not examined for himself, he should adopt the sentiments of his clerical instructors. But the authority of the clergy must not be strained too far. The Scriptures are open to all ; and every

man, according to his ability and opportunities, has a right to search and examine their contents for himself. There is nothing in the New Testament to deprive the laity of this right. When laymen seriously study the Scriptures they have an important advantage over the clergy, which may be justly considered equivalent to the regular training of the latter. The clergy of all established churches are bound to the profession of creeds and articles; and if their researches should lead to any conclusions inconsistent with the doctrines professed by the church to which they belong, they must, as honest, conscientious men, resign their situations in the church; which, in numberless instances, afford the sole means of subsistence to themselves and their families. With how strong a bias will the generality of men so circumstanced study the Scriptures! Here and there an individual is found to give up all worldly advantages for conscience sake; but these instances are, and probably always will be, extremely rare. But it may be said that the dissenting clergy are in more favourable circumstances in their study of the Scriptures. This is in some degree true as to those religious sects which recognize the authority of the Scriptures only, and profess to owe no obedience to creeds and articles formed by fallible men. These are, however, but a very small part of the great body of dissenters; and even with respect to them, the advantage is more apparent than real. The mere circumstance of a congregation assembling for religious worship implies the existence of some bond of union which holds them together. Whatever this may be, it must extend as well to the minister as to his flock; and consequently if he is led by his

study of the Scriptures to abandon it, he must either play the hypocrite, or resign his situation. The layman who sits down to the study of the Bible may, if his conviction should require it, abandon the church or sect to which he belongs without the distressing sacrifice which the minister of religion has to make. He will, it is true, probably be branded with the name of apostate, and condemned for forsaking the religion of his fathers. He may be looked on coldly by his relations and friends, and may be somewhat lowered in his social position; but these are light evils to endure for conscience sake; and the real lover of truth will but little regard them. Very encouraging are the examples of those laymen who have seriously devoted their attention to the study of the Scriptures. The serious, pious, and humble student of Holy Writ may derive most important assistance in his researches from laymen who have travelled in the same path, and laboured in the same field. Few but the ignorant and bigoted of those who are competently acquainted with their works will fail deeply to feel, and gratefully to acknowledge their obligations to Grotius, Locke, and several other laymen. "Grotius," says Doddridge, "has done more to illustrate the Inspired Writings, by what is called profane learning, than all the commentators put together. No man possessed a more extensive and accurate knowledge of the Greek and Latin writers, and no man has more successfully applied them to sacred criticism."

The epistle of St. James is held in no favour by those who consider that faith alone is necessary to our salvation. It has been thought by many that the

doctrine contained in this epistle is inconsistent with what was taught by St. Paul. I am fully satisfied that there is no such inconsistency. It has been shown already that the apostle Paul lays it down that the remission of sins and the beatitudes of heaven are the free gift of God; but that a righteous life is an essential condition of our obtaining these inestimable blessings. The doctrine of St. James will be found perfectly consistent with that of St. Paul. That the former esteemed a good life essential to our salvation is apparent, as well from the general drift of the epistle as from particular texts. "Lay apart," he says, "all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world*." The following large portion of the second chapter gives us fully the doctrine of St. James as to the necessity of good works: "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by

* James, i. 21, 22, 27.

my works. Thou believest that there is one God ; thou doest well : the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead ? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar ? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works his faith was made perfect ? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness : and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see [then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way ? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also *.”

We come now to the epistles of the first of the apostles ; and we shall find him perfectly consistent in his instructions with what we have shown to be the doctrine of the Gospels, the Acts, and those Epistles which have been already examined. “ The time past,” says St. Peter, “ of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revelings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries : wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you : who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead †.” The apostle gives the following instructions to the elders and others : “ The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ,

* James, ii. 14-26.

† 1 Peter, iv. 3-5.

and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed : feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly ; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind ; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility : for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble *." Neither here, nor in any other part of the New Testament, do we find anything to sanction the claims of the clergy to such authority over the laity as is assumed by the church of Rome ; and by such of the Protestants as profess what are called High Church principles. The following texts clearly imply the necessity of obedience to the commandments of God ; and consequently that faith alone is not sufficient for salvation : " For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them †."

I quote the following texts from the first epistle of St. John to show that he considered a righteous life essential to the Christian character. " Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not

* 1 Peter, v. 1-5.

† 2 Peter, ii. 20, 21.

in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world *.” “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother †.” “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not ‡.” In his second epistle the apostle says, “And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, that, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it §.” So in his third epistle: “Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God ||.” In the short and very obscure epistle of St. Jude I find nothing particularly applicable to the subjects of which I have been treating.

We have now arrived at the last book of the New Testament, the Revelation, of which the apostle John is generally believed to be the writer, although some have ascribed it to another author. The following texts will clearly show that the doctrine of this book as to the necessity of good works to our salvation is precisely the same as we have seen laid down in the other books of the New Testament. “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written

* 1 John, ii. 15, 16. † 1 John, iii. 10. ‡ 1 John, v. 18.

§ 2 John, 6.

|| 3 John, 11.

in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works*.” “And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be†.”

The angels of the seven churches mentioned in the early part of the Revelation are generally, and I think rightly, understood to be their bishops. We shall have to inquire presently whether there be a just foundation for the conclusion which has been sometimes drawn from these texts.

Our Saviour is several times called a priest in the epistle to the Hebrews, and in the following text the word priests is applied to pious and virtuous Christians: “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people‡.” “And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father§.” “And hast made us unto our God kings and priests||.” “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years¶.”

I have now gone through the whole of the New Testament with a view to ascertain what are the leading and most important doctrines of the Christian religion; and I have arrived at the following con-

* Rev. xx. 12, 13.

† Rev. xxii. 12.

‡ 1 Peter, ii. 5, 9.

§ Rev. i. 6.

|| Rev. v. 10.

¶ Rev. xx. 6.

clusions : That Christianity is a dispensation of mercy and goodness with which it has pleased Almighty God to bless the human race through the instrumentality of his Son our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, whom he sent into the world to seek and to save that which was lost ; that as all men had become sinners by failing to yield obedience to the Divine law, all were liable to punishment, and therefore in need of forgiveness ; that Jesus Christ was authorized by God to declare not only forgiveness of sins, but the unspeakable gift of a happy eternity to those who believe in him, and live in obedience to the laws of God ; that the first and greatest of the commandments is, to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and souls, minds and strength, and the second, to love our neighbours as ourselves ; that our Saviour inculcates humility, purity, fortitude, and all that the best and wisest moralists have called virtue ; and that, as an essential part of the Divine dispensation, Jesus Christ devoted himself to the instruction of his hearers, gave them in his own person a perfect example of a religious and virtuous life, wrought miracles in attestation of his Divine mission, endured privation and persecution, submitted to a most painful and ignominious death upon the cross, rose from the dead on the third day, and, after many interviews with his disciples, and giving them instructions to promulgate his religion in the world, ascended into heaven. The New Testament further informs us that the apostles professed to be the chosen witnesses of their Master's resurrection ; claimed to be endued with supernatural power ; and that they engaged in a life of peril, and suffered persecution in their efforts to convert the

world to the religion of Jesus Christ. I have found that throughout the Acts, the Epistles, and the Revelation the same doctrines are uniformly taught. The object of Christianity is frequently said in the Epistles to be, to reconcile man to God, that is, to induce him to repent of his sins, to believe in the Divine mission of Jesus Christ, and to live in obedience to the commandments of God. The notion that the end of the mission of Christ was to reconcile God to man, arose at a subsequent period; and, extensively as it has prevailed in the world, it has no scriptural foundation. The language of the New Testament is, that God sent his Son into the world to save sinners. Goodness and mercy have always characterized the dispensations of the Almighty to his human creatures; and the end of all is to bring them to a just sense of his unspeakable perfections, and to an imitation of his moral attributes. Piety and virtue are the only road to happiness; or, to speak more correctly, they are the main constituents of happiness. A man of exalted piety, and of benevolence extended to all whom he can in any way benefit, has in himself a continually flowing spring of felicity which the world can neither give nor take away. All the dispensations of God are intended to lead his human creatures to this state. The Greek philosophers, especially the Stoics, went to extravagant lengths in representing man as capable of rising above the influence of external circumstances, and, being happy in himself, to whatever evils from without he might be exposed. This is not, nor ever can be, the condition of man in this world, constituted as it is at present. Bodily pain, imprisonment, indigence,

accidents, diseases, disappointment, calumny, loss of friends, and numberless others of the "ills that flesh is heir to," will always be afflictive to the best; and those who have reached the highest elevation of piety and virtue will still, under such afflictions, be very far from the enjoyment of perfect happiness. In the main principle, however, that we must look chiefly to ourselves for our felicity, the philosophers were perfectly right; and when we add to this the sanctifying belief that we owe all we have and all we are to the great Creator, and that to Him through Jesus Christ we are indebted for the inestimable blessings secured to us by the Christian religion, we have laid a just foundation for that elevation of soul, which, although it cannot destroy entirely the evils which surround us, tends more and more to lessen their force, and is the commencement of that state of pure and spiritual happiness which we hope will be perfected in the world to come.

It may be thought strange by some that I have confined my inquiries in this work to the New Testament, without adverting to the Old, which the generality of Christians seem to think of equal authority and importance. Till, however, I shall be better informed, I must hold the New Testament to be the institute of the Christian religion. Every sincere disciple of Jesus Christ will willingly accord all the authority to the Old Testament which he ascribed to it. Some may think that this extends to the whole, from the first verse of Genesis to the last of Malachi: others may be of opinion, that while the Divine authority of the Mosaic law is admitted, and the prophets are spoken of as illuminated by

wisdom from on high, there is no sufficient reason to think that our Saviour ever taught that Moses was inspired to instruct the Israelites in science ; or that the history of the Jews is free from errors such as are found in the histories, particularly of the earlier periods, of all nations. Whatever view may be taken of this subject, let all, however fully persuaded in their own minds, refrain from censuring others.

It will be perceived by every reader that the account which I have given of the leading doctrines of the Christian religion is plain, simple, and easily understood. A revelation of the will of God, intended for all, must surely be intelligible to all. Too many indeed have treated Christianity as a revelation in which nothing is revealed ; and have taught men to look for instruction in religion, not directly to Christ and his apostles, but to the creeds and articles of fallible men ; all indeed professing to be derived from the Scriptures, but differing most widely in the various churches and sects into which the Christian world is divided ; each party, in general, condemning all the others ; and not a few exhibiting to the world the lamentable spectacle of weak and erring man presuming, not only to enforce on others his own religious convictions, but to consign to everlasting punishment those who refuse to receive his dogmas. The church of Rome, which assumes to be infallible, may consistently condemn those who deny its claims, and dispute its creed ; but nothing can be more glaringly inconsistent, than that Protestants, who justify their separation from the church of Rome by the right of private judgment, should deny the same right to others which they themselves have exercised. If there be an

infallible church, let us all submit to it ; if not, every one must be left to the exercise of his own judgment. There is no sense in any middle scheme.

I will here anticipate an objection which may perhaps be made to what I have said, that the leading doctrines of the Christian religion are so plain that all may understand them ; and that the instructions of our Saviour and of the early teachers, whose discourses and writings are contained in the New Testament, are a sufficient, and should be our only authority, in the formation of our religious opinions. It is true, it may be urged, that much which is taught by our Saviour and the early teachers is plain and easily understood ; but it is equally true that a large portion of their instructions, as indeed you have acknowledged, is of very difficult interpretation, and has, from its obscurity, occasioned great diversity of opinion in the Christian world. Now, as these obscure parts of Scripture must be allowed to be of equal authority with the plainer ones, is it not a matter of necessity that some guides should be found to explain to the general mass of Christians, who cannot be conceived equal to the task, what is the true meaning of these difficult portions of the same volume ? My first answer to this objection is, that although every thing that is said or written by Jesus Christ and his apostles, and other authorised teachers, is true, it is by no means to be conceded that every part of their instructions is of equal importance to us. Some of their teachings were, no doubt, intended for the instruction of Christians in all ages and nations ; while many others had reference to the particular circumstances of the age, and especially to the opinions, passions and prejudices of the Jews.

Much of the writings of the apostle Paul was intended to explain and defend what was to the Jews a mystery—that is, a thing hidden,—that the Gentiles were to be admitted to equal religious advantages with themselves. This doctrine was directly opposed to the most cherished opinions and feelings of the Jewish nation; and on that account was strenuously urged and insisted on by the apostle. It is plain that with this part of his writings we can have little concern. No one now thinks it extraordinary that the Great Being, who created all men, should extend his care to all; and the only wonder with us is, that the Jews should have clung so fondly to the notion that their nation was exclusively the favourite of the Deity, although the Psalmist had ages before declared that God's tender mercy is over all his works. My second answer to the supposed objection is, that I can see no reason to believe that mistakes in the interpretation of the obscurer parts of the Scriptures can endanger any man's salvation. If this were so, how could the most learned, the wisest, and the best be safe? Can a man be found so besotted by self-conceit, as to imagine that the sense he puts upon every text of Scripture is precisely that which the writer intended to convey? Human folly and presumption can scarcely go so far as this. Let not my readers suppose that I have any hope or wish to insulate each individual of the human species from all around him, and to destroy or loosen those ties which connect man with man. Every one is bound to look with respect and deference to those who are his superiors in ability and learning. Children must and ought to defer to the opinions of their parents and masters; and the

laity, who have not examined for themselves, will be in a great measure guided by their clergy. All this is right and proper in the present condition of the world, nor does it seem likely it will ever be materially altered. The progression of human opinion will probably go on as it has hitherto done. The few will think and inquire; the many will be content to yield assent to the opinions of those around them. When erroneous opinions have long been extensively professed by a large majority, and particularly by those who, from filling exalted stations in the world, exercise great influence over the minds of others, they will be adhered to with a tenacity which the greatest force of reason and argument will, with great difficulty, if at all, overcome. Those who are opposed to established opinions are not likely, in our age and country, to expose themselves to persecution as in former times; but they will be fortunate if they escape misrepresentation and calumny. "No religion," it is truly observed by Lardner, "can be so absurd and unreasonable, especially when it has been established, and is of a long time, that will not find men of good abilities, not only to palliate and excuse, but also to approve and justify and recommend its greatest absurdities." There is so much of feeling, and so much of fear in the general sentiments respecting religion, as greatly to disturb the reasoning powers, and, consequently, to lead to great errors. On no subject is it so difficult for the human mind to arrive at that calm and unimpassioned state which is essential to the investigation of truth, as on religion. Few indeed are able to emancipate themselves from the seductions of the imagination, and the powerful impulses of the

passions. And let us not fondly imagine that we could have formed human nature on a better plan than He who made it what it is. The strength of our passions, and of the affections which spring from them, may be justly ranked among the most important and beneficial elements of the human character; tending, on the whole, to give stability to religion and virtue. Reluctance to change religious opinions must exist in the minds of all on whom they have had a powerful practical influence. There will always be a severe conflict in a well-disposed and amiable mind in adopting sentiments differing with those of parents, brothers and sisters, instructors and friends; and the struggle will be hardest with those who have attained the highest degree of religious and virtuous character. Still the love of truth ought to be paramount. To this we owe the transition from paganism to Christianity; to this the Protestant believes that he owes an inestimable blessing in the Reformation; and to this the most enlightened in our own days are indebted for their emancipation from many of the errors of the early reformers. And why are we to presume that we have reached the confines of sound scriptural interpretation, and have embraced religious opinions in all particulars just and correct, and without a particle of mistake or error? When we are informed in the 19th article of the church of England, "that as the church of Hierusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch have erred, so also the church of Rome hath erred, not only in their living and manner of ceremonies, but also in matters of faith;" how can we fail from asking ourselves, May not the church of England also have erred? Are we to regard the

creeds and articles of that church, or those of the church of Scotland, or the dogmas of any church or sect in existence, as infallible? Surely if infallibility is to be asserted of the doctrines of any church, that of Rome, which first put up the claim to it, and whose authority was allowed universally, for many centuries, has the best title. Protestantism rests altogether on the right of private judgment; and a claim of infallibility in any Protestant church or sect is, in truth, surrendering its very essence,—an assumption quite suicidal. To think, and to let think, is the only consistent principle of Protestantism.

Let it not be supposed, that because the essential doctrines of the Christian religion are plainly laid down, and easily to be understood, that it is an easy matter to be a Christian. It requires the full, earnest purpose of the mind to become so in the highest sense of the term. The difficulty, however, lies not in what we are to believe, but in what we are to be, and what we are to do. Many—I hope a majority—in the Christian world are to some extent influenced in their conduct and character by Christian motives, which keep them from the commission of the more heinous sins, and lead them to the performance of some of the most important duties of life: but to imbibe the full spirit of Christianity; to make it the “man of our council and the rule of our life,” this is what few indeed attain; but towards the attainment of which all professing Christianity are bound to strive to the utmost to make the nearest advances in their power. This is the true Christian warfare which is more or less the business of every day of our lives. To arm us for this perpetual conflict with our unruly

passions and the seductions and temptations of the world, an intimate and frequently renewed acquaintance with the practical parts of the Bible, and particularly of the New Testament, is of inestimable importance. The serious perusal of a chapter of the New Testament every day can hardly fail to improve a man's character. I have again and again stated that Jesus Christ stood alone in the world; and that his most intimate associates were very far indeed from fully entering into his views, and realizing the spirit of his instructions. As it was then, so it is at present. The character of Jesus still stands alone in its solitary grandeur, unequalled, unparalleled. Nevertheless he is our great example, and the duty of every Christian is to make as near an approach to his excellences as possible. Nothing can more tend to advance us in this course than the constant study of his history and instructions. By attending to what he did and what he taught, we may hope to imbibe his spirit, and to become really and truly his disciples by regulating the whole of our lives by his precepts and his example.

As a great object in this work is to show that Christianity may be easily understood; and that, in the quaint language, I cannot now recollect of whom, "it is no cunning thing to be a Christian," I may fairly be asked whether the means afforded to the common unlearned Christian are sufficient for that purpose; in other words, whether the English translations of the original Greek Testament are sufficiently accurate to enable an English reader, unacquainted with Greek, to collect from them the leading doctrines of the Christian religion. It will be convenient to narrow

the question, and make the inquiry whether the common authorised version is sufficient for that purpose. This question I am happy to be able to answer decidedly in the affirmative. After having studied the subject for a great many years, and carefully examined the original with this and several other translations, I have no hesitation in giving my opinion, that the common version of the New Testament is, in general, an excellent and accurate translation; although no candid inquirer can deny that it contains many, and some considerable errors. Neither, however, in that nor in any other English translation with which I am acquainted, will a sober, rational, and thoughtful reader fail to find distinctly laid down the essential doctrines of the Christian religion.

But although all that is necessary to make a man a Christian may be found in a translation, there can be no doubt that a fuller and more accurate knowledge of any book—and the New Testament is not an exception—may be acquired by studying the original than by the best translation. Every language has its peculiar character and idiom, and contains words and phrases which cannot be transferred with perfect clearness and precision into any other language. Many ancient manuscripts and versions of the Greek Testament have been examined by learned men, who have been enabled thereby to correct errors, suppress some passages, and add others to the text which were not contained in the edition used by our translators. We have therefore the Greek Testament in a far more correct shape than they had. It is true that translations have appeared from later editions of the Greek, but none of them have supplanted, or seem likely to

supplant, the common version ; which is, indeed, in most respects so excellent, and is become so sanctified in our minds by its constant use in the public services of the church, and in private study and devotion, as to make it desirable that it should be the basis of any new translation ; and that the alterations should be confined to such parts as are erroneously translated, to what has been added or subtracted on sound critical principles by the editors of the Greek text ; and to such alterations of the language as the changes which time has wrought in the English tongue have made expedient. It is strange, and deeply to be lamented, that while classical literature is cultivated with great and increasing assiduity, very few, indeed, of the best-educated laity devote their time to the study of the Greek Testament. Such, however, I fear, is the fact. No doubt this arises principally from a want of that deep interest in religion which its unspeakable importance demands ; but two other causes, I suspect, tend to produce this strange neglect ; first, a prevailing sentiment that the study of the Scriptures is exclusively the business of the clergy ; and secondly, the peculiar character of the language of the New Testament. The first arises from the unwarrantable assumption of authority by the clergy which reached its acme in the church of Rome, and is still successfully claimed and practised in most Protestant churches. The second cause I conceive to operate in this way. The Greek of the New Testament differs materially from that of the classical writers of Greece, whose elegance of style is not attained by any of the writers of the Sacred Volume, although some of them make nearer approaches to it

than others. It also contains many Hebrew forms of expression quite foreign to classical Greek. I fear that those who are well acquainted with the best writers of ancient Greece, when they sit down to the study of the Greek Testament, are repelled by the homeliness of the style, and the absence of that elegance of expression to which they have been accustomed; and thus are prevented from pursuing the study of the Scriptures in the original tongue. After all, I freely confess that the second cause assigned for the neglect of the study of the Greek Testament is merely conjectural, and that I may be altogether mistaken. With respect to the first cause mentioned above, I can hardly be so. It will be more fully considered in a subsequent part of this work.

Before I quit this subject, I must endeavour to impress earnestly on the minds of my readers the necessity of studying the Holy Scriptures with a humble spirit. Humility, which is little considered by some moralists, and despised by others, finds a prominent place in Christianity. The nature of it, however, is often misunderstood. Humility does not require us to think worse of ourselves than we deserve. We should on all matters endeavour to form a just and accurate judgment of ourselves as well as of others. Every man is bound to do his best for those around him; and the fittest preparation for fulfilling the duties of life is a just sense of what we are able to do. An ill-founded diffidence might deprive the world of the advantages derived from the statesman, the divine, or the philosopher. Let each individual duly consider what he can do for the good of society in general, and for his

own family, friends, and connexions, and regulate his conduct accordingly. But to do this effectually he must form a just estimate of his own knowledge and abilities. I have no doubt that in some instances individuals have been prevented from acting their parts in the world efficiently by a want of that degree of self-reliance to which their talents and acquirements fairly entitled them. Undoubtedly, however, the overrating of ourselves is a far more common error; and in order to prevent our falling into it, the greatest vigilance, and a deep sense of our weakness and proneness to error, are requisite. This is real humility; and it is an important element of wisdom. A true Christian believes that Jesus Christ and his apostles were sent into the world on a Divine mission, and therefore he is bound to receive with submission all that they taught, so far as he apprehends it; and to exert his best powers by a constant and diligent study of the New Testament rightly to understand their instructions. Let the Sacred Volume be constantly, seriously, humbly, and piously studied; and let its study be accompanied by fervent prayer to Almighty God to assist the student's researches, and he need yield to no fear of offending his Maker, although he may perhaps expose himself to the censures and anathemas of those who set themselves up as the Privy Councillors of Heaven, if he should happen to arrive at any conclusions inconsistent with their dogmas. Let him at all times regard with respect and deference those who possess greater ability or learning than himself; but refuse to relinquish a particle of the liberty with which Christ has made him free.

PART IV.

THE PROGRESS, PRESENT STATE, AND FUTURE
PROSPECTS OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

I SHALL now proceed to solicit the attention of my readers to some reflections on the progress of Christianity; the changes which it has made in the condition of the world; its present state; and the anticipations which we may reasonably indulge respecting its advancement, and its probable future effects on the well-being of the human race. I shall confine myself as much as possible to large and general views of these most important subjects: to treat them in detail would require far more time and labour than I am able to devote to the subject; would swell this book to an inconvenient size; and would be inconsistent with its main object, which is to bring together in a small compass the evidences and the leading doctrines of natural and revealed religion, and the reflections which are to follow.

We have seen that the Christian religion made a rapid progress in the world; and that in less than thirty years after the crucifixion, the Christians were cruelly persecuted at Rome by Nero on a false charge of having set fire to the city. This was the first persecution by the Romans, and it was followed by nine others, in which the followers of Christ endured the severest sufferings of every kind; imprisonment, and

every variety of exquisite torture which the infernal ingenuity of their persecutors could invent, from which death alone relieved them. All this they bore with unshaken fortitude, supported by unhesitating faith in their religion, and a firm reliance on Him who will reward the sufferers for his cause in this world with a "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" in that which is to come. Worthy of the highest honour is the noble army of martyrs; and when the spirit of discontent begins to stir within us at the ordinary troubles and sufferings of life, let us call to mind what they had to endure, their unconquered fortitude, and their faith and trust in Him who ordereth all things for the best to those who love and serve Him. Let us make it the subject of sincere and heartfelt thanksgiving that we are not called to abide the fiery trial; resign ourselves with entire acquiescence to whatever afflictions our all-bountiful Creator may inflict upon us; and learn to "rejoice in all things with joy unspeakable and full of glory." The tenth and last persecution of the Christians under the emperor Diocletian appears to have been the most extensive and severe of all; but the time of refreshment was at hand. The emperor Constantine, who ascended the imperial throne in the year 306, stopped the persecution, and professed himself a Christian. Christianity became the established religion of the mighty Roman empire.

Whatever may be thought of the aggressive spirit and the unbounded ambition of the Romans, which led that wonderful people to extend their dominion from the Atlantic ocean in the west to the frontiers of Persia in the east, and from Caledonia in the north

to a large portion of Africa, including Egypt, on the south; however a well-regulated, and especially a Christian mind, may think and feel that much which we are often called on to admire in their history, is in truth deserving of the severest reprobation—it cannot be doubted that the fact of the most civilized parts of the world having been united under one government was eminently favourable to the advancement of Christianity when it had become the religion of the state. I cannot, indeed, conceive any other merely human means by which its advance could have been so rapid and so extended. Evil and good, however, are so mingled in this world as to render it in general impossible to attain a large portion of the latter without a considerable infusion of the former. When Christianity was combined with the state, it soon became infected with ambition and worldliness. The early teachers of this heavenly religion had felt that their Master's kingdom was not of this world. They had assumed no undue authority; had coveted no worldly honour or power. But when the Christian religion became that of the state, by degrees a hierarchy was established claiming distinctions and authority which the early teachers had never assumed, encroaching more and more on the right of private judgment on one hand, and on the lawful civil power of the state on the other, till in the middle ages the pope became more than a match for emperors and kings; and a grinding ecclesiastical tyranny was established, from which happily a great portion of Europe was freed by the Reformation; but which keeps its hold, though with greatly diminished power, over a still larger part of the European nations.

It will be necessary here to recall our attention to the information which we have derived from the New Testament as to the state and form of Christian churches in the apostolic period. We have seen that the apostles held the highest place, and exercised the greatest power among the primitive Christians, but that they were careful not to push their authority beyond what was necessary for the establishment of their religion; and that they seem on all practicable occasions to have admitted not only the elders, but the whole body of worshippers, to a joint exercise of power with themselves. The apostles selected, probably with the approbation and consent of their respective congregations, persons who are generally denominated elders, but sometimes bishops, to give instruction and to superintend the affairs of the congregations. Some were appointed to administer charities, and probably to manage other affairs of a temporal character, who are called deacons. To these, it appears from some of the epistles of St. Paul, were added women, who are called deaconesses, probably for the like services. I trust I have made it perfectly clear by what has been said already, that the words bishop and elder, or as it is often translated presbyter, were names of the same office. Very early, however, and before the writing of the Revelation, the title bishop appears to have been appropriated in each church or congregation to one elder or presbyter, who enjoyed precedence over the rest. The word made use of in the Revelation to designate this person is not indeed bishop, but angel, one of whom is addressed for each of the seven churches to whom the Revelation is made. These angels, however, have

been universally understood to mean the bishops of the respective churches. It is clear then that St. John mentions these angels or bishops as the heads of their churches, but he gives us no information as to the authority which they possessed. Considering that no distinction is made in any other book of the New Testament between bishops and presbyters, and that no apostolical authority can be produced for placing a Christian church under the dominion of a single individual, I cannot think that the bishop ought to be regarded in any other light than the president or chairman of the presbyters. This indeed supposes such a number of teachers in each church as may seem improbable to those who take their ideas of church matters from what they see before their eyes in our own days. But we ought to bear in mind, that at that time there were no clergy, but religious instruction to the congregations was given by those who had their own secular affairs to attend to, and therefore could not give so much of their time to teaching religion as our clergy, who are often exclusively devoted to that duty. I see no reason to think that the office of a bishop extended in the time of the apostles, or for a considerable period afterwards, beyond one church or congregation, or at most beyond the churches of one town. Diocesan bishops must have been introduced long afterwards. "Sozomenus," Milton tells us, "who wrote above twelve hundred years ago, in his seventh book, relates from his own knowledge, that in the churches of Cyprus and Arabia (places near to Jerusalem, and with the first frequented by apostles), they had bishops in every village; and what could those be," he asks,

“more than presbyters*?” A living dignitary of the Church of England who, by many excellent works, has deservedly attained a very high rank in the literary world, after discussing, with great candour, the question of the origin of episcopacy, brings forward an argument which he thinks conclusive against the opinion which has been mentioned above, that the bishop was originally nothing more than the president of the elders or presbyters. “At a very early period,” he says, “one religious functionary, superior to the rest, appears to have been almost universally recognized; at least, it is difficult to understand how, in so short a time, among communities, though not entirely disconnected, yet scattered over the whole Roman world, a scheme of government popular, or rather aristocratical, should become in form monarchical†.” It would indeed be difficult to understand, and we may add impossible to believe, that bishops possessing such authority as has been claimed and exercised for many centuries, could have arisen at an early period by usurpation over the elders or presbyters who had previously been their equals; but assuming this to be the case, is taking for granted the matter in dispute. We learn from St. John in the Revelation, which Lardner thinks was written about 95 or 96 A.D., that bishops existed in the seven churches of Asia Minor mentioned in that book; but as to the degree of power which they possessed we have no information whatever. As they are addressed as the heads of their respective churches, they must

* Eikonoclastes, xvii.

† Milman's (Dean of St. Paul's) History of Christianity, vol. ii. chap. 4, p. 64.

of course have enjoyed the highest rank; but that their position drew with it such a degree of authority as can justify the application of the term monarchical, remains to be proved.

I wish to confine myself in this work as much as possible to the New Testament; but it will be perhaps desirable to introduce a few observations respecting the works of Ignatius, which are thought by many to afford a strong confirmation of the opinion that bishops were originally a separate and superior order in the church to presbyters*. Ignatius, according to Lardner, was bishop of Antioch in Syria, the latter part of the first, and the beginning of the second century. If then we can get an account of the actual state of the church at that very early period, it may render us material assistance in forming at least a probable conjecture as to what was its original form. We shall, however, find great difficulties in our way. The following is Lardner's account of the works said to have been written by Ignatius. "Besides seven epistles mentioned by Eusebius and Jerome, there are several other epistles which have been ascribed to Ignatius. But they are now almost universally supposed by learned men to be spurious, and I think are plainly so. Of these seven mentioned by Eusebius and Jerome, there are two editions: one called the larger, and oftentimes the interpolated; and another, called the smaller. And, except Mr. Whiston, and perhaps a few others who may follow him, it is the

* I use the word presbyters instead of elders, because it has been far more generally adopted; but the word is unnecessary, as elder is the accurate translation of the original Greek word in the New Testament.

general opinion of learned men, that the larger are interpolated, and that the smaller have by far the best title to the name of Ignatius. I have carefully compared the two editions, and am very well satisfied, upon that comparison, that the larger are an interpolation of the smaller, and not the smaller an epitome or abridgment of the larger. I desire no better evidence in a thing of this nature." Since Lardner's time, indeed very lately, considerable light has been thrown on the controversy respecting the epistles of Ignatius; which has induced a learned writer, who has deeply studied the subject, and who supports his opinion by apparently very strong arguments, to conclude that three only of these epistles were written by Ignatius; and that even those three have many interpolations in the common edition*." He has shown that an ancient Syriac MS. contains only these three epistles, and that much that is found in what is called the smaller edition of Ignatius has no place in the Syriac version. The epistles of Ignatius in the hands of Mr. Cureton shrink into a very small compass indeed. I am far from intending to enter into the Ignatian controversy, which fills many volumes; but seems so completely to have lost all interest, that Mr. Cureton tells us that he has never met with one person who professes to have read the celebrated book of Bishop Pearson on the subject. I shall content myself with a few observations on what has been already stated, adding only that many learned men have come to the conclusion that the whole of these epistles are spurious. Let us look at

* Cureton's *Vindiciæ Ignatianæ*, published in 1846: Cureton's *Corpus Ignatianum*, published in 1849.

the state of facts already brought forward. I will confine my observations to the seven epistles which have been generally received, leaving the others to their fate. These epistles have come down to us in three different forms; and assuming one or other of them to be genuine, there is room for three different opinions. Either the larger is the genuine edition, and the smaller and the Syriac version are abridgments of it; or the smaller is the genuine, to which the larger has considerably added, and from which the Syriac has taken away; or the Syriac version is the original, and has been enlarged by unwarranted additions in the smaller, and still more in the larger edition. Each of these opinions has found supporters among learned men, but the larger much fewer than the smaller edition. The Syriac version has been discovered since the far greater part of the controversy was written, but the editor expresses his strong conviction that it is the only genuine edition of the epistles; that all the other epistles ascribed to Ignatius are spurious; and that the additions, of which there are many even in the smaller edition, are unauthorised interpolations. Add to this, that a considerable number of learned men have rejected these epistles as altogether spurious; and the difficulty of coming to a satisfactory conclusion about them is greatly enhanced. Now, the question I would ask of any candid and thoughtful man is, whether he can think that, amid all this uncertainty respecting these epistles, any stress can be fairly laid upon them as teaching things not contained in the New Testament; or rather as giving evidence of the then state of the Christian church, from which we may be led to

form different opinions respecting it from those which may be derived from the New Testament? I do not pretend to much reading of the textual controversies about the writings of Ignatius and the other Apostolical Fathers, as they are called; but a very slight acquaintance with them will show the student that complaints of interpolations are so frequently made as to lead to very serious doubts as to the integrity of any existing copy of them. In the early ages of the Christian church there is, I fear, too much reason to think that the different parties into which it was divided had little scruple in supporting their opinions by the production of spurious works, and by unauthorised additions to the works of former writers. This was no difficult task when books could be multiplied only by the laborious copying of MSS., and few readers could have had recourse to the original manuscripts.

But it may be asked, May not the same thing have happened to the manuscripts of the New Testament; and what security can we have of the integrity of the Sacred Volume? To this I think it may be fairly answered, that, from the great reverence in which the writings of the New Testament must always have been held, the desire to possess them have led to far more copies being made of them than of any other books; and consequently interpolations would with much greater difficulty find reception in the world. It is indeed remarkable of how very little importance in general are the variations which are found in the ancient manuscripts and versions of the New Testament. Some few of more importance have apparently been introduced for the purpose of sup-

porting particular doctrines, but their absence from the older manuscripts and versions affords the means of detecting their spuriousness. The most remarkable of these, the text of the three witnesses, is, I believe, almost universally rejected, and on grounds as satisfactory as any one could possibly expect on such a subject.

I return with pleasure from the very dim twilight in which we have been groping about after the Ignatian epistles to the clear daylight of the New Testament. After an attentive perusal of all that is to be found there on this subject, I rise with an unhesitating conviction that no plan of perpetual church government was settled by the apostles. That elders were appointed by them in the churches there can be no doubt; and that they sometimes delegated the authority to do so to others, as Titus is directed to ordain or appoint elders in every city. I have already given some reasons why I think it probable that the members of the respective churches took part in these appointments; but the New Testament is not clear on that head, and I therefore lay no stress upon it. It is, however, certain that at a later period the whole church elected the bishops; and that the tumults attending these popular elections occasioned the choice of the bishops to be afterwards confined to the clergy. Now, if the apostles had appointed an order of men who were to exercise certain powers in the church, to be themselves the successors of the apostles, and to appoint others to succeed them, it seems perfectly inconsistent with such an arrangement that a popular election of bishops could ever have been introduced. On reviewing the whole matter,

the just conclusion appears to be, that if the apostles had purposed to lay down any plan of church government which was to continue in force in all future times, they would have expressly declared their intention; and that the silence of the New Testament on the subject affords a conclusive argument that nothing of the kind was intended. The whole matter of church government appears to have been left for all classes and bodies of Christians to arrange for themselves in the best way they could. Freedom of opinion and action is the inestimable possession of every Christian. All may exercise their own judgments both as to the doctrines taught in the Scriptures, and as to the discipline which is best calculated to secure and extend the Christian church in the world.

It cannot be denied that great and highly beneficial changes have taken place since the introduction of Christianity, which have rendered the state of society far better than that of the ancient republics of Greece and Rome. The Greeks were the civilizers of the world. They laid the foundations of philosophy and science, and pursued them with eminent success. They have left us some of the noblest specimens in most of the higher branches of literature, and remains of architecture so admirable, that the moderns have been able to add nothing to it, although they have invented an architecture of their own of a totally different character, and deserving all admiration. The sculpture of Greece is universally admitted to be to this day unrivalled; and there is good reason to believe that painting had arrived at a very high degree of excellence in Greece, but from its

perishable nature, the best specimens have long been lost. The general character of the Roman mind was not inventive, but many of their writers attained the highest eminence in literary composition. Their extraordinary talents for war and state affairs; their dauntless courage, their unconquerable tenacity of purpose, their magnanimity under reverses of fortune, the wisdom with which their measures were planned, and the energy with which they were carried into execution, advanced them by degrees to the dominion of the civilized world. They spread through the vast extent of their dominions all that the world then possessed of art, science, and literature. But although under their rule civilization made great advances, there is a reverse side of the picture which no benevolent mind can look at without horror and detestation. Dreadful is the scourge of war at all times and under any circumstances, but there is much in modern warfare to distinguish it favourably from the wars of the ancients. It is impossible to read the histories of Greece and Rome without a deep feeling of horror at the recital of the indiscriminate slaughter of men, women, and children, which constantly took place, and of the miseries of the prisoners who were reduced to a state of degraded and wretched slavery. The heart sickens at the recital of these enormities. I will hasten over them as quickly as possible, adverting particularly only to the accounts given by Josephus of what took place at and after the siege of Jerusalem. That historian tells us, that when the Jews, pressed by famine, left the city in the hope of finding food, and when they were attacked by the Romans, defended themselves, and were taken, they were first

whipped, and then tormented with all sorts of tortures, before they died, and were then crucified before the wall of the city. He says the Romans caught every day five hundred, and sometimes more; and that the multitude crucified was so great, that room was wanting for the crosses, and crosses wanting for the bodies. Josephus, after a recital of dreadful calamities attending the siege and the taking of the city, informs us that ninety-seven thousand were carried away captive. What treatment these miserable persons received we shall now see. "While Titus," says the historian, "was at Cæsarea, he solemnized the birth-day of his brother (Domitian) after a splendid manner, and inflicted a great deal of the punishment intended for the Jews in honour of him; for the number of those that were now slain in fighting with the beasts, and were burnt, and fought with one another, exceeded two thousand five hundred." He also mentions, that a still more pompous solemnity took place at Berytus on the birth-day of the emperor Vespasian, "so that," he says, "a great multitude of the captives were here destroyed in the same manner as before."*

Wretched as was the condition of the captives who were thus cruelly slaughtered, it may be doubted whether that of the survivors was not still more calamitous. It would take much more space than I can spare, and would be quite unnecessary, to go into any detail of the wretchedness of those who, having been taken captive in war, were reduced to a state of slavery by the Greeks and Romans. The deplorable condition of these unhappy people is well known; and their numbers were enormously great. The boasted

* Wars of the Jews, chap. iii. 1.

liberty of the ancients was the privilege of the dominant few, who held thousands and thousands of men and women of like feeling with themselves in a state of degrading and wretched slavery. The patriotic devotion to their country, of which the ancients made their boast, was combined with an utter disregard to justice, mercy, and compassion in their conduct to other nations; and, indeed, to the inhabitants of the Grecian states in their wars with each other. The mild spirit of Christianity, even in the imperfect state in which it has hitherto been received in the world, has done much to mitigate the evils of war and of slavery. Wars are now carried on in a far less ferocious spirit, and captives in general do not find much to complain of in the treatment which they receive from their conquerors. Slavery has in general ceased to exist among the European nations, and among some of their descendants in America, though it unhappily continues in the slave states of the American Union, among those who consider themselves the freest people on earth. There are, however, indications that its doom is approaching, although no one seems yet to have shown distinctly the best means by which the ultimate emancipation of the negro race may be accomplished.

The belief of the Jews in one God, the Creator and Governor of the world, is their great distinction from other nations; and the Old Testament abounds in expressions of the most exalted sentiments respecting the Great First Cause. Still the Jews always considered themselves as the peculiar people of God, and had but little sympathy with the Gentile world. It was reserved for Christianity to break down the par-

tition wall between Jew and Gentile. It offered its blessings to all nations, and represented God as the common Father of all. The ancient nations had each gods of their own, and these fancied deities were believed to aid their respective votaries, and consequently to be often in hostility to one another. The circumstance of all the nations of Christendom having agreed in acknowledging one God and one Saviour has undoubtedly tended to soften animosities, to introduce a milder spirit in their mutual intercourse, and to mitigate the horrors of war. Unhappily this softening influence has generally not extended beyond the pale of Christianity. The crusades and other wars with the Mahometans generally were carried on in a spirit of bigoted ferocity; and the treatment of the Jews by Christians in the middle ages was marked with the greatest injustice and cruelty.

Among the beneficial results of the establishment of Christianity we may with unhesitating confidence place the improved condition of the female sex. Whatever exalted notions have been entertained of the matrons of Greece and Rome, and however interesting are the anecdotes of some of them which have come down to us, there cannot be a doubt that the condition of women in most Christian countries is far superior to what it was in any of the ancient nations. The noble and generous, although in some particulars wild and fantastic chivalry of the middle ages, greatly elevated and improved the condition of the fair sex, and has had lasting and beneficial effects on their state in the world.

It cannot be denied that civilization and knowledge, and what in some degree always attends them,

liberty, have made much further advances among the nations of Christendom than in the most enlightened countries of ancient times. True it is that there is still much tyranny and oppression in the Christian world; that in too many countries the many are treated as if they were made for the few; but it can hardly be doubted that even in the worst-governed Christian countries the mass of the people are in a happier condition than that of any nation in the ancient world. No class in Europe is placed in so miserable a state as the slaves in the dominions of Greece and Rome; and those unhappy beings were a very great part of the population. Tyranny and anarchy are the Scylla and Charybdis of politics. If political power is confined to one or a few, tyranny is sure to prevail; if large bodies of people exercise it, it almost necessarily happens that a state of anarchy is the consequence, worse in its effects than the worst of tyrannies. It is in modern and in Christian times that the inestimably beneficial plan of representative government has been introduced. By this admirable invention the political power of the people at large consists chiefly in the election of their representatives, to whom is always committed the whole or a share in legislation, and sometimes the appointment of administrative and judicial officers. In our own country the representative is by no means considered as a mere delegate. He is sent to parliament, not as the mouthpiece of his constituents, but as a representative of the people in general; and is bound on all occasions to give his vote in such a manner as he thinks will best promote the public good.

But it may be said, that admitting that the great

improvements in the condition of society which have been enumerated, have arisen since the promulgation of Christianity, it does not follow that the Christian religion is really the cause of the beneficial changes. The business of philosophy is to trace effects to their causes ; but the more the mind has been engaged in philosophical investigation, the more deeply does it feel the difficulties of the task ; more particularly in respect of morals and politics, which indeed is nothing more than a branch of morals. As, however, it cannot be denied that civilization and an improved condition have existed more extensively, and have been carried further among the nations of Christendom than in any Pagan or Mahometan country ; and, as it must be admitted by every candid mind, that the practical principles of the Christian religion are eminently favourable to the virtue and happiness of the human race ; it is, I think, a rational inference, that, although civilization might perhaps have made further advances than it had previously done if Christianity had never been introduced into the world, there is no sound reason for thinking that it could have reached its present state without the aid and influence of Christianity. So far then as this branch of our inquiry goes, we come to the reasonable conclusion, that Christianity has proved a great benefit to the world.

One good we undoubtedly owe to it,—the devoting of one day in the week to a cessation from worldly business, a rest from our labours, an attendance on public religious worship, and the reading of the Scriptures and other religious books for our edification and advancement in religion and virtue. The blessings of this day are inestimable to all, but espe-

cially to the lower classes. To the poor man, bowed down by the labours of six days, sometimes called on to make exertions beyond what his constitution can bear, and often employed in occupations of an unhealthy character, which lead to disease, and shorten the duration of life; who comes to his humble home wearied every night, and incapable from fatigue to relish the few enjoyments which it affords; living almost a stranger to his wife and children, and enjoying little of the domestic charities of life which are the best solace of its toils and troubles; to him Sunday is indeed a pearl of great price. On that blessed day he enjoys with his wife and children the sweet delights of domestic love, engages in friendly intercourse with his neighbours, and wanders with delight, accompanied by his wife and children, in the most pleasant places which his neighbourhood affords: in the house of God he feels himself in a state of equality with his rich neighbours, many of whom perhaps usually treat him with indifference, and some with contempt; he is at home in that place where the rich and poor meet together to worship God, who is the Maker of them all; while in his own habitation some part of the day is employed in the perusal of that inestimable book which abounds in consolation to the afflicted, in promises of forgiveness to the penitent, in all that precept and example can afford to lead us on to the practice of religion and virtue, and with the elevating hope of eternal felicity in the world to come. Sadly indeed are these innocent delights interfered with by those who give to the Lord's day the austere character of the Jewish sabbath; making it a period of gloom and dejection; and severely condemning

all innocent recreations. Giving this harsh character to the day of rest arises from a notion that it is a continuation of the Jewish sabbath, the day only being changed from Saturday to Sunday. Extensively as this opinion prevails in the Christian world, it rests on no scriptural authority. The Lord's day is nowhere in the New Testament called a sabbath, or said to take the place of the Jewish sabbath in the Christian dispensation. The apostles were all Jews; and I see no reason to suppose that they and other Jewish Christians held themselves absolved from obedience to the Mosaic law as long as the temple remained standing at Jerusalem, and the temple services continued. An incident mentioned in the 21st chapter of Acts sets this matter in a clear light. St. Paul, having gone to Jerusalem, gave an account to James and the elders of his success in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. Then follows this remarkable passage: "And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: and they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together; for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads; and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning

thee, are nothing ; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law*.” The apostle assented to this proposal, and then gave a public proof of his obedience to the Mosaic law. But although the apostle, as a Jew, conformed to the law, he was, as we have seen already, a strenuous assertor of the entire freedom of the Gentile converts from the law of Moses. “Let no man,” he says, “judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holiday or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come ; but the body is of Christ†.” It is to my mind perfectly clear, that St. Paul, in these texts, includes the sabbath among the Jewish ordinances which are not binding on Gentile Christians. The Jewish sabbath, then, not being obligatory on Gentile Christians, I must ask those who contend for the sabbatical character of the Lord’s day, to show me any passage from the New Testament to prove that it was substituted by our Saviour or his apostles in the place of the Jewish sabbath ; and that we are bound to observe it with the same strictness as was required of the Jews. I have searched the New Testament in vain for such an authority ; and I am fully satisfied that none such exists.

With respect to the Lord’s day, the observance of it as a Christian festival in commemoration of the resurrection of Christ, was practised by the apostles and early disciples ; and although there is no express command given that it should be observed in all future ages in the Christian church, yet the example of the early Christians, the obvious necessity of setting apart some particular seasons for the celebration of public

* Acts, xxi. 20–24. † Col. ii. 16, 17.

religious worship, and the undoubted advantage of a period regularly recurring at no great distance of time, of a day devoted to religious instruction, and to rest from ordinary labour, have induced the Christian world to continue the observance of the Lord's day, and to attach great importance to it. There is nothing, however, in this which should interfere with innocent enjoyment. The most pious and the most learned man cannot employ with advantage or improvement all the waking hours of Sunday in public and private prayer, singing praises to God, hearing sermons, reading the Scriptures and religious books, and meditations on religious subjects; and to expect this to be done by the working man is a gross absurdity. Supposing then a due portion of the day to be devoted to attendance on public worship, and to religious occupations at home, how should the remainder of it be spent? I unhesitatingly answer, in any innocent enjoyments which may present themselves to the individual, and which are not calculated to weaken the impression made on his mind by the duties of the day. The Lord's day is the proper designation of Sunday, and the name which, I believe, has been invariably used in legislation respecting it. The word Sabbath was, I think, in this country, first applied to it by the Puritans, and with the use of that word the rigorous observances of the Jewish sabbath were most unjustifiably united to the periodical weekly festival of Christianity. We owe so much of our civil and religious liberty to the Puritans, that I can never think or speak of them but with respect; but in regard to Sunday, and not a few other matters, they fell into what I believe a very large majority of

the best-informed, and most thinking Christians agree in esteeming great errors. It is sad to consider how much the religion of love has been disfigured by the unwarranted additions of well-intentioned and truly pious, but strangely mistaken men. One would really think that the opinion of a certain class of divines was, that nothing is so displeasing to the Deity as the happiness of his creatures, in spite of the indications of benevolent design in the works of creation, and of the reiterated assertions of the goodness and mercy of God, both in the Old and in the New Testament.

Two great steps in advance of humanity were made by the first Christian emperor Constantine; he abolished the cruel punishment of crucifixion, and he laid restraints on the shows of gladiators, although they were not entirely abolished till the reign of Honorius, A.D. 403*. The gladiators were originally captives, slaves, and condemned malefactors, to whom, strange to relate, freeborn citizens sometimes added themselves. The slaughter in their savage encounters was immense. We are told by Dion Cassius, that after the triumph of Trajan over the Dacians, 10,000 gladiators were brought forward to fight with and destroy one another†. The mind shudders at the thought of the miseries inflicted by these barbarous spectacles. If, on one single occasion, so many human beings were slaughtered, how extensive must have been the destruction of human life during the long period when these spectacles were among the favourite amusements of the Romans!

I have represented the Christian religion as a great

* Justin's Remarks on Ecclesiastical History, vol. iii. p. 220.

† lxviii. 15.

blessing to the world ; and I have no doubt that it has been so, even amid the various corruptions of it which have existed, more or less, in every period of its history, and by which its beneficial influence has been and is greatly impeded. It cannot, however, be in fairness denied that Christianity, though not the cause, has been the occasion of very great calamities. Much of these evils may be traced to the proneness of the human mind to superstition on the one hand, and to enthusiasm on the other ; but the far greater part has originated in an unauthorized assumption of spiritual power by the priesthood, and a most unjustifiable union of temporal and ecclesiastical authority, which has called in the former to support and enforce by pains and penalties the usurpations of the latter. If the Christian community had been always mindful of the words of Jesus, that his kingdom is not of this world ; if, in pursuance of his command, they had refused to call any man lord or father, and if Christian teachers had been mindful of St. Peter's injunction, "not to be the lords over God's heritage," the greater part of the evils which I am now going to enumerate could never have existed.

Whether Christianity could have continued by any merely human means to subsist in the world without the protection of the state, is a question which no one can satisfactorily answer. We cannot possibly know what its condition would have been if the powers of the world had been always either adverse or indifferent to it. It is indeed easy to assert that God would take care of his own church, and the assertion is true ; but how do we know that the protection of religion by the state is not the appointed means of Divine

Providence for its preservation? I know not to what conclusion the reflections of others may lead them, but for myself I feel no hesitation in stating my own belief, that a very large majority indeed of the Christian world are Christians, for no other reason than that Christianity is the established religion of their country. I can see nothing in what passes around me to induce me to believe that one in a thousand, or a much larger number, is a Christian on inquiry and conviction. I shall, however, have to consider state establishments of religion hereafter, and shall, for the present, refrain from any further observations on this subject.

When the emperor Constantine became a Christian, and the Christian religion was established in the Roman empire, the professors of the faith might have reasonably congratulated themselves that the persecutions were ended, and that from thenceforth they would be left to peace and security in the profession of their religion. They probably entertained no apprehension that the demon of persecution was to assume a new form, and that new sufferings would be inflicted by the dominant party of Christians on those who should presume to dispute their authority on points of religious belief, and hold what they should be pleased to call heretical doctrines. There was, however, introduced shortly after Christianity became the religion of the empire, the notable plan of settling disputes and controversies, not by reason and arguments, but by counting heads. Bishops from all parts of Christendom, with all their errors and prejudices about them, assembled in general councils; and however great the errors of individuals

might be, it was assumed that the result of their consultations was infallible truth, to which was to be affixed the stamp of orthodoxy; and to dissent from which was deservedly to incur the penalties of imprisonment, tortures and death in this world, and eternal punishment in the world to come. Persecution raged throughout the Christian world; and the persecutors deemed themselves to do glory to God by tormenting and destroying his creatures. In the lamentable disputes about the Trinity, Athanasians and Arians enjoyed power in turns, and both abused it by the persecution of their opponents, till at length a complete victory was gained by the Athanasians. The following are the sensible remarks of Dr. Jortin respecting general councils:—"Let us," he says, "imagine then a council called by a Christian emperor, by a Constantine, a Constantius, a Theodosius, a Justinian, and therein four or five hundred prelates assembled together from all quarters, to decide a theological debate. Let us consider a little by what various motives these various men may be influenced, as by reverence to the emperor, or to his counsellors and favourites, his slaves and eunuchs; by the fear of offending some great prelate, as a bishop of Rome or of Alexandria, who had it in his power to insult, vex, and plague all the bishops within and without his jurisdiction; by the dread of passing for heretics, and of being calumniated, reviled, hated, anathematized, excommunicated, imprisoned, banished, fined, beggared, starved if they refused to submit; by compliance with some active leading and imperious spirits, by a deference to the majority, by a love of dictating and domineering, of applause and respect, by vanity

and ambition, by a total ignorance of the question in debate, or a total indifference about it, by private friendships, by enmity and resentment, by old prejudices, by hopes of gain, by an indolent disposition, by good nature, by the fatigue of attending and a desire to be at home, by a love of peace and quiet, and a hatred of contention, etc. Whosoever takes these things into due consideration, will not be disposed to pay a blind deference to the authority of general councils, and will rather be inclined to judge that the council held by the apostles at Jerusalem was the first and the last in which the Holy Spirit may be affirmed to have presided. Thus far we may safely go, and submit to an apostolical synod; but if once we proceed one step beyond this, we go we know not whither. If we admit the infallibility of one general council, why not of another? and where shall we stop? at the first Nicene council A.D. 325, or at the second Nicene council A.D. 736? They who disdain private judgment, and believe the infallibility of the church, act consistently in holding the infallibility of councils; but they who take their faith from the Scriptures, and not from the church, should be careful not to require or yield too much regard to such assemblies, how numerous soever*.” The same learned author cites a respectable contemporaneous authority as to the character of one of the general councils. “A council of gladiators,” he observes, “held in an amphitheatre would be as venerable as that of the Constantinopolitan Fathers, if Gregory Nazianzen may be believed†.”

* Remarks on Ecclesiastical History, vol. iii. pp. 55–57.

† Ibid. p. 58.

It is a gross absurdity to pretend to settle any point of faith or opinion by the determination of a majority. In practical matters, where men are to act together for the purpose of attaining a common object, the minority must give way to the majority; but truth, or even probability of a correct opinion, can never be obtained by an arithmetical process. Assuming our rational faculties alone to be concerned in the matter, any one at all acquainted with the state and progress of human opinion, must be aware that on all subjects which require much thought and reasoning, it is so far from being true that the majority have always, or generally been, right, that it is much nearer the truth to say that they have always been wrong. It is to the thinking few in all ages and countries that we must look for the most correct opinions and the furthest advances towards the discoveries of truth. The opinions of the thinking and the wise make a slow, but happily a sure progression in the world. Deep thinkers command the assent of a few candid minds in their own age, and often obtain adherents among the young, whose minds are not enslaved by long-established and inveterate prejudices. In another generation their opinions spread more extensively, and in the end their truth comes to be generally acknowledged. Neither the Baconian nor the Newtonian philosophy made a rapid progress in the world; but time, the great ally of truth, has long established them. Even the strongest and the most profound minds cannot entirely free themselves from the prejudices of the age in which they live. Literary history gives many curious instances. Harvey, the great discoverer of the circulation of the

blood, is reported to have said of Bacon, that he was no great philosopher, and that he wrote on philosophy like a lord chancellor; meaning, I presume, like one whose mind had been chiefly employed on other subjects. Bacon himself rejected with disdain the Copernican system; and Newton entertained very unjust suspicions as to the tendency of some of Locke's writings, as he owns in a penitential letter to that great philosopher and excellent man. Shakspeare, universal Shakspeare, seems, in the 'Merchant of Venice,' to have imbibed in its full virulence the persecuting spirit of his age and nation against the Jews, and he makes those whom he wishes us to esteem, restore to Shylock half of his forfeited property on condition of his performing an act of hypocrisy in professing himself a Christian.

But it will be said by the believers in the infallibility of general councils, that they were guided in their decisions by the Holy Spirit. Admitting this to be true, it follows that all the previous debates and discussions on the subject must have been totally useless; and that all the malignant feelings which they have never failed to generate have been pure evil unmixed with any good whatever. If indeed the Deity will interfere to show us what is right, nothing can be more impertinent, or more wanting in reverence to Him, than disputing about matters which He only can decide. Our Saviour, in giving his Divine instructions, spakè with authority as one entitled to be obeyed; so also did the Hebrew prophets and the apostles. They never resorted to the absurd project of setting people to reason on matters beyond the powers of their understanding, and in the end making

the majority, by supernatural means, to give their votes on the side of truth, leaving the unfortunate minority to flounder on in error. According to this strange scheme, bishops were to be assembled from all parts of Christendom, and were to be set to work to argue the matter in hand, each, according to appearance, exercising his rational faculties, while in reality that was the case with the minority only, the majority being influenced and guided by the Holy Spirit. Surely this is not the way in which God deals with his creatures. Can it for a moment be doubted, that, whenever He has revealed his will, he has accompanied his revelation with such proofs as are satisfactory and conclusive to our rational and moral faculties? But it may be said that all the bishops were really left in the first instance to the exercise of their natural faculties; but that, after a time spent in debate, the Almighty interfered, and, by his Holy Spirit, led the majority into the path of infallible truth. But this is only substituting one absurdity for another. The infallibility of the Pope is perfectly intelligible, and involves none of the difficulties and absurdities which belong to the notion of the infallibility of a general council. There would be no other difficulty than that of ascertaining whether an individual lawfully filled the chair of St. Peter, and obedience to his behests would be the duty of all Christians.

To the doctrine of infallibility, whether existing in a general council, in a Pope and council, or in the Pope alone, is to be traced all the frightful persecutions for infidelity, heresy and schism which have given to ecclesiastical history the appearance of having been

written in characters of blood. First and foremost in the list of Christian persecutors stands the Church of Rome, to which belongs the guilt of all the horrid tortures inflicted on her victims within the walls of the inquisition; and consummated by Jews, infidels, and heretics being roasted alive, in the presence of assembled multitudes, who were so far deluded as to believe that those were doing God service by their inhuman and unchristian persecutions. That church is answerable in a great degree for the barbarities of the Spaniards inflicted on the unoffending Indians in America, and altogether for the fires of Smithfield in our own country. But although Popery holds the first place in the history of Christian persecution, it must be admitted that Protestantism was not slow to follow her example. Though the early reformers did not in so many words set up a claim of infallibility, they undoubtedly assumed it in fact by the persecution of those who differed with them in doctrine; for what can be conceived more absurd than punishing any one for professing a doctrine which we do not certainly know to be false? Supposing you were to ask any one who persecuted another for what he called heresy, whether he was certain that the obnoxious doctrine was false, it is evident that nothing short of an affirmative answer could justify him, even in his own judgment. It is well known that Luther and Calvin, and many others of the reformers, made no scruple of persecuting heretics; and the burning of Servetus by Calvin was attended by circumstances of peculiar atrocity. Even Socinus, who found refuge in Poland, and who would not have been tolerated in any Protestant nation, was himself a persecutor of

David, who deviated more widely than himself from the general opinions of the Christian world. In our country we hear enough, and perhaps more than enough, of the persecutions of bloody Mary; but I suspect that comparatively few are aware that two persons were burned alive for heresy in the reign of Elizabeth, and two in that of James the First. A most touching appeal was made to Elizabeth on behalf of these heretics, as they were called, by Fox, the author of the *Martyrology*, to whom the queen was so much attached as to be in the habit of calling him Father Fox, but it was made in vain. That able and politic, but heartless and tyrannical sovereign, was deaf to the voice of reason and compassion; and the unhappy sufferers endured the dreadful punishment of being burned alive.

But imprisonment, tortures, and death, for errors real or supposed in religion, are far from being the whole of the evils inflicted on the human race by the Church of Rome. If the views of Christianity taken in this work be correct, religious liberty and the right of private judgment are the inalienable rights of every Christian. The spiritual authority of the Church of Rome is in direct opposition to these rights, and therefore can only be lawfully exercised over those who voluntarily consent to obey it. When a man chooses to part with his liberty, and to submit to the will of another, he has no right to complain of the exercise of authority over him to which he has voluntarily submitted himself. To that extent the authority of the Church of Rome, or of any other church, may be held lawful. But the pretended successors of St. Peter have been far from confining themselves to

merely spiritual matters; and by degrees they assumed a power above that of all the princes and states in the world. One of the principal steps by which the church advanced its temporal power was by getting into its hands very large landed possessions. These were no doubt sometimes voluntarily bestowed, with a sincere desire to forward the cause of religion; but probably much more frequently extorted by the fears excited by the clergy as to the future world, and by the hope of atoning for a life of violence, oppression and cruelty, by giving their property to the service of religion. The extent to which, in this country, these donations were made to the church, after a time, was felt to be a great grievance. "The feudal services," says Blackstone, "ordained for the defence of the kingdom, were every day visibly withdrawn; the circulation of landed property from man to man began to stagnate; and the lords were curtailed of the fruits of their seignories, their escheats, wardships, reliefs, and the like*." These evils were felt to be intolerable; and they gave occasion to the various Acts of Parliament in our statute book to restrain what is technically called "alienation in mortmain." Those who feel disposed to become acquainted with the cunning, and often successful devices by which the ecclesiastics sought to evade these salutary laws, may satisfy their curiosity by a perusal of the elegant pages of the great commentator on the laws of England.

The see of Rome, however, was far from confining itself to the accumulation of landed property in the hands of the clergy as a means of advancing its power.

* Blackstone's Commentaries, Book ii. chap. 18.

The pope, as the vicar of Christ, claimed an authority beyond the control of the civil power ; and a succession of ambitious and able pontiffs, a Gregory, an Innocent, and a Boniface, set up successfully a power above the sovereigns of the world. The humiliation of the emperor Henry IV. before the haughty Gregory VII., and the surrender of his crown by our dastard monarch John to the legate of Innocent III., are well-known historical facts. The papal usurpations of temporal power were carried to their highest point by Boniface VIII., who boldly claimed the whole authority of what was called the holy Roman empire*. Such audacious and unfounded presumption, however, could not long be endured even in that calamitous period of human history, that time of violence and brute force which is called the middle ages. “Boniface,” says Hume, “was among the last of the sovereign pontiffs that exercised an authority over the temporal jurisdiction of princes ; and these exorbitant pretensions which he had been tempted to assume from the successful example of his predecessors, but of which the season was now past, involved him in so many calamities, and were attended with so unfortunate a catastrophe, that they have been secretly abandoned, though never

* “Lorsqu’en 1298, Albert d’Autriche se révolta contre Adolphe de Nassau, se fit couronner roi des Romains à sa place, et le vainquit peu après dans un combat où Adolphe fut tué, Boniface non seulement refusa de le reconnoître, mais il le traita comme un traître et un rebelle ; et mettant la couronne sur sa propre tête, il saisit une épée, et s’écria, “C’est moi qui suis César, c’est moi qui suis l’empereur, c’est moi qui défendrai les droits de l’empire.”—Sismondi’s Républiques Italiennes, chap. xxiv. tome iv. p. 130.

openly relinquished, by his successors in the apostolic chair*.”

Those who have the happiness to believe that all the events in the world are under the control of Divine Providence, will be slow to think that any great and extensive evil has been permitted to exist without some portion of good inseparably connected with it. That this has been the case with respect to the great ecclesiastical usurpation of the church of Rome, I cannot entertain a doubt. This subject has been very ably treated by a learned writer, who has attained high distinction as well in the political as in the literary world; and the elegance and beauty of whose style is so captivating, that it is impossible to peruse his works without great pleasure, even when we may happen not to be able to coincide with his opinions†.

M. Guizot, after making a just distinction between (what have been too often confounded) Christianity and the church, the essence of the former being a common belief, and common feelings and sentiments, and the latter consisting of an organized system of ecclesiastical authority, proceeds to state that he considers the church as the human means of the preservation of Christianity in the world. His views are clearly expressed in the following words: “S’il n’eût pas été une église, je ne sais ce qui en serait venu au milieu de la chute de l’empire romain. Je me renferme dans les considérations purement humaines; je mets du côté tout élément étranger aux conséquences naturelles des faits naturels: si le christianisme n’eût été,

* History of England, chap. xiii. vol. ii. p. 296, 8vo ed.

† Guizot’s *Civilisation en Europe*, deuxième leçon.

comme dans les premiers temps, qu'une croyance, un sentiment, une conviction individuelle, on peut croire qu'il aurait succombé au milieu de la dissolution de l'empire et de l'invasion des barbares. Il a succombé plus tard, en Asie et dans tout le nord de l'Afrique, sous une invasion de la même nature, sous l'invasion des barbares mussulmans ; il a succombé alors, quoiqu'il fût à l'état d'institution, d'église constituée. À bien plus forte raison le même fait aurait pu arriver au moment de la chute de l'empire romain. Il n'y avoit alors aucun des moyens par lesquels aujourd'hui les influences morales s'établissent, ou résistent indépendamment des institutions, aucun des moyens par lesquels une pure vérité, une pure idée acquiert une empire sur les esprits, gouverne les actions, détermine les évènements. Rien de semblable n'existait au IV^e siècle, pour donner aux idées, aux sentiments personnels une pareille autorité. Il est clair qu'il falloit une société fortement organisée, fortement gouvernée, pour lutter contre un pareil désastre, pour sortir victorieuse d'un tel ouragan. Je ne crois pas trop dire en affirmant qu'à la fin du IV^e et au commencement du V^e siècle, c'est l'église chrétienne qui a sauvé le christianisme ; c'est l'église avec ces institutions, ses magistrats, son pouvoir, qui s'est défendue vigoureusement contre la dissolution intérieure de l'empire, contre la barbarie, qui a conquis les barbares, qui est devenu le lien, le moyen, le principe de civilisation entre le monde romain et le monde barbare." These remarks appear just and satisfactory. The Christian religion was at first established by supernatural agencies. Since the first age, I see no satisfactory reason for doubting that its preservation and advancement in

the world have been left to natural means ; and the church appears to have been the means appointed for those purposes. Let it not be for a moment supposed that I am here denying, or attempting in the slightest degree to weaken a belief in the Divine influence on the mind of man. All who admit that prayer to Almighty God is a duty must in consistency assent to this doctrine. When a man prays for Divine assistance to enable him to resist temptation, he must hope that such assistance will be granted. When he prays for Divine aid on his inquiries after religious truth, he must hope that it will be given to him. I see, however, no reason to believe that Divine direction to man is afforded in any other way than through the medium of his rational and moral faculties ; and it is to the working of these, however aided and directed, that I apply the terms human means.

“A religious establishment,” Paley justly observes, “is no part of Christianity ; it is only the means of inculcating it.” The question then of the expediency and of the value of it must depend on its answering the purpose for which it is established. We have found reason to conclude that the right of private judgment is the privilege and inalienable possession of every Christian. To infringe on that right can be no other than a usurpation. In like manner civil and political liberty are rights of the human race ; and no other infringements of them are lawful than such as are required for the public good. In the middle ages the civil and political rights of men were disregarded ; and the mass of the people all over Europe were subjected to the tyrannical rule in some degree of the sovereign, but far more extensively to

that of the feudal lords. The assertion which has just been made, indeed, requires some limitation; and in our own country in particular the spirit of liberty led to many struggles against the arbitrary and tyrannical proceedings of the ruling powers, which in several important instances were crowned with signal success. It cannot, however, be denied that the general character of the middle ages was violent, oppressive, and tyrannical. The mass of the people were totally unprovided with the means of combining and organizing their strength so as to offer effectual resistance to the oppression of their rulers. The church was in those times the only refuge from the tyranny of the civil powers. The liberties to which man has an inalienable right were trampled on both by the civil and the ecclesiastical powers, but the one was to a considerable extent antagonistic to the other, and the consequence was some mitigation of the wretchedness of the people in that dismal period. But when in process of time the invention of printing had given a far wider extension to knowledge than had ever been known before; when the noble sentiments of the great writers of Greece and Rome became widely disseminated in the European world; and, above all, when the Holy Scriptures were made accessible to the people, the world was awakened from its long slumber; a love of civil and religious liberty prevailed extensively; a greater share of political and civil freedom was extorted from kings and nobles; and the Reformation asserted the principles of religious liberty, although its leading advocates swerved lamentably in practice from these principles. The religious tyranny of the Church of Rome, and the political

tyranny of kings and barons in the middle ages were alike opposed to the rights and well-being of the human race; but by Divine Providence the former proved no small mitigation of the oppressions exercised by the latter.

No one will be found bold enough to deny the vast advance of literature and science since the era just adverted to; but doubts may still be entertained on the subject of religion. The *laudator temporis acti* may well exclaim,—“Look at the noble churches which were erected during the middle ages; and call to mind what has been done since in the way of providing places for religious worship. Consider the state of our own metropolis. In its ancient part, the city of London, you meet with churches in all directions, and which were quite large enough for the accommodation of all its inhabitants at its most populous period, while in the north-western part of the metropolis you might, till within a few years, have passed through street after street, and square after square, comprising a part of the district compared to which the remainder is quite insignificant, without finding a church or any building whatever erected for the purpose of religious worship. Of late, indeed, many churches have been erected in this part of the metropolis; but even at the present moment, the places of worship, including as well the chapels of Roman Catholics and Dissenters as those of the established religion; are very far, indeed, from affording sufficient room for all the inhabitants of the populous and wealthy parishes of St. Pancras, St. Marylebone, and Paddington.” The observation is a fair one, and of no small weight in a discussion as to the state of

religion in the middle ages and in our own times. It might well lead to a very long examination of particulars which would be required in order to come to a sound conclusion on the subject. It will not, however, be necessary here to enter on any such comparison, as it must be admitted that the Christian religion has neither in our own nor in any former age produced effects equal to what might have been expected from its genius and character. It is to future times that we must look for the bright light and animating heat of Christianity, purified from every human pollution, to clear the intellects, and warm the hearts of professing Christians. A single observation I will venture to make. The great principles of religion are fear, hope, and love. The first stimulates us by the dread of future punishment, the second by the expectation of future reward, and the last by a sense of the intrinsic beauty and excellence of religion. The first and second may be properly considered as steps in advance towards the third, which is the perfection of true religion. If I mistake not the character of the religion of the middle ages, it had far more of the principle of fear, than either of hope or of love, and much more of the former of these two than of the latter. Few, however, even down to our own times, have advanced much beyond hope and fear; and the religion of love, in other words, Christianity in its purest, brightest, and loveliest form, has yet to be established in the world called Christian.

In the latter part of the 17th century appeared the writings of John Locke, a name never to be pronounced without respect and veneration. No writer, I think, has done so much in laying down and

enforcing rational views in metaphysics, religion and politics. Much of what he has written on education deserves serious attention; and he may perhaps be considered as the father of political economy. I am far from thinking that the works of this great and excellent man are free from many considerable errors; but the spirit of his writings is excellent; and their effects in advancing sound thought and reasoning, and, above all, in setting forth and exposing the sources of intellectual errors, have been incalculably great. It is, however, the rational faculty only that the works of Locke are greatly calculated to improve. Little of them is properly ethical, and he unhappily embraced what is usually called the selfish theory of morals*, a system irreconcilably opposed to the noblest and best feelings and sentiments of the human mind. The philosophy of Locke found adherents among many of the ablest writers and closest thinkers of the 18th century. Much that is excellent may be met with in their writings concerning both philosophy and religion; but on the last-named subject they are in general too exclusively rational. Reason has undoubtedly an important part to maintain in religion, but not the only part, nor even the highest. A man may have very rational and just theoretical views of religion, and nevertheless feel little or nothing of its power. It is when the heart is given to God, and then only, that the full power of religion operates in the soul. Moral sensibility is the source from which flows all that is most excellent in religion. It is the mind which is most alive to moral beauty, which feels most deeply all that is amiable in senti-

* See Essay on the Human Understanding. Book ii. ch. 28, par. 5.

ment and conduct, which is best prepared for the reception of Christianity in its most exalted form. To him who possesses a high degree of moral sensibility, goodness in any shape is irresistibly attractive. The most exquisite productions of genius in his estimation have far less interest than exalted goodness. This in all its manifestations is the object of his supreme delight and love, and he cannot rest till he has traced it up to the great Author of all good, in the contemplation of whose perfections he finds rest for his soul, and a perennial object of faith, and trust, and love. Now little, I apprehend, of this character could be found in the middle ages. A few well-constituted and happily disciplined minds perhaps really attained to the love of God and of goodness ; but in general the hope of reward and the fear of punishment seem to have been called into vivid action ; and the latter far more than the former. Churches were, I fear, generally erected in the hope that the founder would, by that good work, be saved from the eternal torments of the world to come. In the earlier part of the period, after a life spent in the pursuits of ambition, and distinguished by treachery, oppression and cruelty, the monarch would sometimes choose to finish his days in the garb of a monk ; hoping, by assuming that character, and by building a church or an abbey, to escape from the punishment which he felt to be due to his crimes.

I have endeavoured in this work to show that the right of private judgment should be enjoyed by every Christian ; and that neither pope, patriarch, archbishop, bishop, synod, nor ecclesiastical assembly, has had, or can have, authority to set aside this

right, or in any degree to diminish it. But it is nevertheless admitted that the usurped ecclesiastical power had a beneficial effect in controlling and mitigating the oppression of civil tyranny in times when no other antagonistic power could have been brought to act effectually against it. In the present age the state of things is essentially different. The invention of printing has completely changed the state of society in all the civilized parts of the world; and a return to the ignorance of the mass of the people in the middle ages we may safely pronounce to be impossible. We are naturally led to the inquiry, what, under the altered circumstances of the world, are the best means to be adopted for the support and extension of the Christian religion?

It is plain, that every church, whether in words calling itself infallible or not, which lays down doctrines, not in terms expressed in the Scriptures, condemns any deviation from those doctrines as heresy, and denounces separation from its communion as schism, does in effect claim to be infallible. But this assumption is in direct contradiction to the right of private judgment, which is the inalienable privilege of every Christian, and the real principle of the reformation. This assumption of authority in religion must therefore be rejected by every consistent friend of the right of private judgment. The important question remains, whether the establishment and support of a particular form by the state is calculated to advance religion, or whether it should be left entirely to the exertions of individuals without any intervention of the civil power? Religion, say the supporters of what is called the voluntary system, will support itself by its own intrinsic excellence, and by divine grace,

independent of any authority of the civil power ; and if such authority be called to its aid, its inevitable tendency will be to establish and to perpetuate error in doctrine, and to oppress and probably persecute those who reject the dogmas, and separate themselves from the communion of the established church. Religion, it is true, answer the friends of establishments, is the gift of God to man, and he will undoubtedly provide means for its continuance and extension ; but we have no reason to expect a series of miracles to be performed for that purpose, unless it should appear that ordinary human exertions for its maintenance and support are inadequate, which is a question for inquiry. We conceive that a religious establishment does afford these means, and on that account we support it. This is, I believe, a fair statement of the question at issue. All agree that something must be used for the support of religion, and the question is, what are the means best fitted to secure that most important object ? The question of the utility of a church establishment is, in its application to this country, greatly encumbered by difficulties which do not necessarily belong to it ; but which are derived from the particular character of the church of England. When Henry the Eighth threw off his allegiance to the church of Rome, his leading objects were the divorce of queen Catharine, and a marriage with Anna Boleyn, which the pope would not allow. Henry, in rejecting the pope's authority, had no other intention but to substitute his own. Nothing could be further from his thought than the recognition of the right of private judgment. Even the reformers on the continent, who deviated much more widely from the church of Rome

than the church of England has ever done, were far from being consistent in their adherence to the principle of private judgment, on which the Reformation was founded, and by which alone it can be defended. Each church had its own dogmas and its own form of worship; and each held a deviation from its doctrines to be heresy, and a withdrawing from its communion to be schism. Thus were the reformers reduced to the inconsistency of defending the right of private judgment in their contests with Rome, and virtually denying it when they had to do with those whom they called heretics and schismatics. It was not to be expected that the founders of the church of England would be wiser than the continental Protestants. No where does the inconsistency above mentioned appear in a more striking form than in the 20th and 21st articles of the English church. The 20th article is as follows: "The church hath power to decree rites or ceremonies, and *authority in controversies of faith*; and yet it is not lawful for the church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's word written, neither may it expound one place of scripture, that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the church be a witness and a keeper of holy writ, yet, as it ought not to decree anything against the same, so, besides the same, ought it not to enforce anything to be believed for necessity of salvation." Surely this is setting up the right of private judgment with one hand, and knocking it down with the other. If the church possess *authority in controversies*, there must be persons subject to that authority, whose duty it is to obey it. It is then of essential consequence to ascertain who are those who possess

lawful authority to command, who are those who are bound to obey, and what are the limits of the required obedience. On all these subjects I fear we shall find ourselves quite in the dark. First, as to the church which is to command obedience to its decisions. We had been already told, in the 19th article, that "the visible Christian church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same." This definition of a Christian church seems to involve difficulties which few, if any, can be found to solve, and which are far beyond the reach of ordinary apprehension. First, the church is to consist of a congregation of faithful men. But supposing two congregations, each of which appears to be composed of faithful men, to come to different conclusions on some question of faith—no uncommon case certainly—who is to decide, and by what means, which is really the congregation of faithful men which has authority in controversies of faith, and which, therefore, we are bound to obey? Again, the sacraments must be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance. Now we know that these ministrations differ in different churches; which then of these is to be held to have authority to *decree* rites and ceremonies? Again, the church is a congregation of faithful men, and I see nothing in the article that gives authority to one member of it over another: are then all the members of the congregation to be called together to decide on matters of faith, and is the question in dispute to be settled by the majority, or in what other way? Again, by a congregation we

always understand a number of people assembling in the same place of worship : now there are many thousands of such congregations in this kingdom : are they all to be called together to settle matters of faith, and is the sentence of the majority of the whole to prevail ? Certainly no sane men could for a moment have thought of resorting to such absurdities as these. There can be no doubt that the word church, in the 20th article, was intended to express something very different from the definition of the same term in the preceding article. By the church is intended the clergy, and that is the meaning attached to it at the present day by the high-church party. If, indeed, you ask any one of them whether the church consists of the clergy only, he will give a negative answer, and admit that the laity are an essential part of the church ; but only take the trouble of carrying your inquiry a little further, and every sincere and honest high-churchman will give you to understand that the clergy are to command and the laity to obey. The whole high-church system would crumble to pieces if it were once allowed that the laity had any share whatever in deciding controversies, and in settling points of faith. The clergy then are those whose authority is to be recognized ; but here arise difficulties, which, I fear, neither the articles nor their most acute supporters and expounders can remove. To say nothing of foreign churches, how is the power of the English clergy to be exercised ? We have in England two archbishops, each presiding in his own province over a number of suffragan bishops, and besides the bishops, there are two other orders of clergy, priests and deacons. Which of these, or are

they all collectively to exercise authority in controversies of faith? Are the clergy of the two provinces to act separately or collectively? If the whole body of clergy are to act together, is no more weight to be given to the vote of an archbishop than to that of a mere priest, or even of a deacon, if they should be included? Supposing the authority to belong to archbishops and bishops only, what are their relative rights? Assuming these different questions to be satisfactorily answered, what is to be done in case of a difference of opinion among the bishops? There seem to be no means of coming to a conclusion but by the majority deciding; but such majority may be very small, only exceeding the minority by a single vote. Is such a majority to be allowed, without appeal, to settle a disputed doctrine? The framers of the articles seem to have felt that such an arrangement could not be satisfactory; and the 21st article is apparently intended to carry matters further, with a view to an ultimate decision of the point in dispute. It runs thus: "General councils may not be gathered together without commandment and will of princes. And when they be gathered together (forasmuch as they be an assembly of men, whereof all be not governed with the spirit and word of God) they may err, and sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining unto God. Wherefore things ordered by them as necessary to salvation, have neither strength nor authority, unless it may be declared that they be taken out of holy scripture." Truly this is confusion worse confounded. Here are as many difficulties as sentences. In the first place general councils are not to be gathered together "without commandment and

will of princes." What princes? is the first inquiry. There appears to be no reason why any Christian prince should be excluded, to say nothing of those Christian countries which, having adopted a republican form of government, have no princes. All the princes of the Christian world, consisting of those who belong to the church of Rome, those of the Greek church, and all the various forms of Protestantism, must agree to assemble the clergy of their respective countries in a general council. That such a body can never be assembled is quite evident. The church of Rome, which considers all others to be heretical and schismatical, will never agree to assemble in council with the bishops of those churches whose members it holds not to be within the pale of salvation; nor will the Greek or the Protestant bishops be prepared to meet those of the Roman church, whose first step, they well know, would be to assert an authority in their church which the Protestant and the Greek must at once reject. Supposing this formidable difficulty surmounted, and waving all consideration of the civil power interfering at all in the settling of religious disputes, as it is here made to do by the consent of princes being held necessary to the assembling of a general council, let us consider what good end could be answered by the meeting and the discussions of all the bishops in Christendom, or of so many of them as should attend the council. In the first place, the decisions of such a body could only be received by those Christians who acknowledge the divine authority of episcopacy. Now, it is notorious that a large section of the Christian world rejects this doctrine; and of course could not be bound by the decisions of a council com-

posed of bishops only. But leaving those persons to themselves, let us consider what the results of such a council as we have supposed to be called together would be, as affecting episcopalians only. There are two possible suppositions as to the result of the deliberations of the council: either they might come to a conclusion agreeing with the doctrine of some one of the existing churches, or they might differ with all of them. In either case what hope would there be of their decrees being generally adopted? If they were to decide on any doctrine differing from the dogmas of the church of Rome, that church, which professes to hold the same doctrines from the beginning, without a particle of error, would undoubtedly not give way to the decision of those whom it accounted heretical and schismatical bishops. If the decision were in favour of the Romish, it would inevitably be rejected by the Greek and the Protestant churches, who know full well that the claims of the church of Rome are destructive of their very existence. Be the decision of the council what it might, the defeated party would inevitably reject it, as being the work of those who (in the language of the article) "be not governed by the spirit and word of God." The last clause of the 21st article shows clearly the utter worthlessness of a general council, by telling us that things ordained by them as necessary to salvation have neither strength nor authority, unless it may be declared that they be taken out of Scripture; and leaving us entirely in the dark as to who is to declare whether those doctrines be taken out of Scripture or not. General councils have had their day; and in the present state of the Christian world it is impossible that such a body can

be assembled ; nor can we anticipate or expect any combination of circumstances which could lead to their revival. Their absurdity has been already pointed out. They have ascended to the limbo of vanity. *Requiescant in pace.*

I am very far from thinking that the divines who framed the thirty-nine articles had the slightest hope or wish that Protestants would ever have recourse to a general council for the settlement of their doctrinal differences. They had all been brought up in the communion of the church of Rome, and had been taught to look with reverence to general councils. When they became sensible of what they believed to be great and grievous errors of the church of Rome, and made up their minds to engage in the perilous work of bringing about a reformation, they speedily found that the decisions of many of the later councils were undeniably favourable to the claims of that church ; and therefore they were constrained to deny their authority ; but their minds were not sufficiently opened to perceive that submission to the decision of a general council was essentially at variance with the principle on which alone they could justify their separation from the church of Rome. The conflicting sentiments therefore of a reverence for the decisions of the earlier general councils, and a necessary denial of the authority of some of the later of them, led to the unintelligible compromise which is expressed in the 21st article.

I am anxious that it should not be supposed that I intend to cast any reproach on those who framed the thirty-nine articles. I believe them to have been honest and pious men, and that in settling the articles

they had no other object but to express what they believed to be sound Christian doctrine, and thereby to advance the cause of piety and virtue in the world. If they were unable to emancipate themselves from the errors and prejudices of their age, the same thing may be said of the wisest and best of men of all ages. We live in far more enlightened times, and can plainly see their errors. In like manner those who inhabit the earth in some future age, when intelligence shall be more advanced than it is at present, will probably discern errors existing in our days as palpably as we now perceive those of former ages. Let us then all be mindful of our proneness to error, and follow the pursuit after truth in the spirit of Christian humility.

At the era of the Reformation the great practical error of the reformers was, attempting to attain a uniformity of belief in all points of religion, which subsequent experience has proved to be impracticable. I have already endeavoured to show that the essential doctrines of the Christian religion are to be derived from the discourses of our Saviour, and the discourses and writings of his apostles and early followers; and that these doctrines are easily understood. But besides these, the Scriptures contain much of greater or less importance, which every one who is able to do so should use his best exertions to understand, but concerning which great diversity of opinion has existed in all ages of the Christian church. It was in the attempt to bring all minds to agree on these doubtful points that the early reformers wasted their strength in vain; and the consequences have been deplorable. Instead of all who profess themselves

followers of Christ uniting to advance the cause of piety and virtue in the world, Christians have been divided into different churches and sects, each in general attaching an undue importance to its own peculiar doctrines, and often outraging Christian charity by misrepresenting, abusing, and anathematising all whose religious opinions differed with their own. Not only has this attempt to achieve an impossibility in bringing all to agree on disputed points of religion led to the division of the Christian world into different sects, but it has entirely failed to secure unanimity among those who professedly belong to the same church, and are called by the same name. Even in the pretended infallible church of Rome much difference of opinion has existed; and, to say nothing of older controversies, those between the Jesuits and the Jansenists, and between the supporters of the ultra-montane and the cis-montane doctrines, reach to our own times. The thirty-nine articles, which were intended to ensure unanimity of opinion, have entirely failed of their object. A Calvinistic and an Arminian party were formed among the clergy of the Church of England at an early period of her history; and so notorious are the differences of opinion among its members at the present time, as to have occasioned the publication of an article in the 'Edinburgh Review' giving an account of the different parties under the denominations of High Church, Low Church, and Broad Church*, which has been

* This is, as far as I know, a new term, but I presume it has been adopted in reference to the divines called Latitudinarians in the days of Charles the Second. See an interesting account of them in Burnet's History of his own Times, book ii.

very generally read ; and which, it is to be hoped, will tend to open men's minds to the vanity of the attempt to procure unanimity on subjects which afford not the slightest hope of its being attained. Very lately has raged, and indeed does so at this moment, a controversy respecting baptism. Both parties agree in admitting it to be a Christian rite, and in ascribing great importance to it ; but they differ as to its operation and effect ; and on this account Christian charity has been violated ; and the controversy has been pursued with a virulence which has deeply grieved every religious mind. Truly this is a notable instance of the success of the attempt to attain unanimity in the church !

If it be admitted that the right of free inquiry belongs to every Christian, it follows that all attempts to set up an authority inconsistent with that right, whether by the professed infallibility of the Church of Rome, or the implied infallibility of Protestant churches, must be resisted by all who are determined to exercise their freedom as to the doctrines of religion. If then a particular form of religion cannot be adopted and endowed by the state without an infringement of the inalienable right of private judgment, it follows that such an establishment ought not to be allowed to exist. If, on the other hand, it be possible to set up an established religion which shall not interfere with this sacred right, the important question arises, whether the cause of religion is likely to be advanced by such an establishment, or whether it be the wiser course to leave religion entirely unconnected with the state ; in other words, to adopt what is commonly called the voluntary principle.

It would, I conceive, be a great mistake to suppose

that all the members of the established church in this country are supporters of the high-church principles which are undoubtedly laid down in the articles. Few probably doubt that a considerable body of the clergy, and a very large majority of the laity, would willingly and even gladly assent to such an alteration as would get rid of all interference with the rights of conscience, if the change could be brought about quietly, without producing fierce and violent controversies which would outrage Christian charity, and of which no man could foresee the end. Religious disputes have been in general conducted in so dogmatical a spirit, and with so much heat and violence, as to deter the wisest and best men in a great measure from engaging in them. Few indeed have been the instances in which controversies on questions of religion have been carried on with good temper, good manners, and a kindly feeling of the opponents to each other. Strange indeed it is, that, while all feel how subject they are to fall into error in temporal affairs, very few indeed can be found who entertain a doubt that their religious opinions, even in their minutest details, are infallibly correct! Advancing intelligence will, it is to be hoped, in time bring about a happier state of things, when religious inquiries and discussions will be conducted with the calmness and impartiality which their importance requires, and without which there is but little hope of beneficial results.

I have already given the reasons which have led my mind to the conclusion that religious establishments have been hitherto efficacious and powerful means of supporting and advancing religion in the

world, and the important question remains, whether they are still necessary for that purpose, or whether religion should be left for support to the voluntary exertions of individuals altogether unconnected with the state.

In order to come to a satisfactory solution of this most important question, it will be necessary to consider what are the religious wants of the community, and which are the best means of supplying those wants. Unspeakably great is the importance of free inquiry in religion. To it we owe the triumph of Christianity over Paganism, and the establishment of the Christian religion in all the most civilized countries in the world. To the same cause we are indebted for the Reformation, and for the correction of many of the errors of the early reformers ; nor can it be reasonably doubted, that if we and those who follow us devote our time and attention to the study of the Scriptures, and avail ourselves of all the means in our power for our advancement in religious knowledge, clearer and juster views of Christianity may still be attained than those which are professed at the present day. The human mind will not stand still. It is destined to a progressive or to a retrograde motion. Christianity has shown itself fitted for various conditions of society. Under the despotic Roman emperors its votaries lived in obedience to the laws, gave edifying examples of virtuous lives, and exhibited fortitude in suffering imprisonment, tortures, and death in its most frightful forms, which deserves our highest veneration. In the free governments of modern times, Christianity is still the most powerful instrument of good, affording the strongest incite-

ments and motives to piety and virtue, and the best consolation in the days of affliction. We must, however, bear in mind that free inquiry in religion has in all ages been confined to a very few individuals, and I see no reason to expect that in any future age it will be very widely extended. The great mass of the population in every age and country will probably to the end of time believe what their instructors teach them; and consequently the state and condition of religion in the Christian world will greatly depend on the knowledge, talents, and characters of those who take upon themselves the function of teachers in the church. The religious wants of the common Christian can only be supplied by a Christian ministry; and this has been admitted by Christians in general by setting apart a class of men to conduct their religious services, and to administer their religious rites. The fact that the Quakers and some few small sects have no settled ministry does not afford an exception to the general rule of much importance. The number of the members of those sects is very small compared with that of those who avail themselves of the services of regular ministers of religion; and they, in common with others, partake indirectly of the benefits derived from the public oral instructions of the ministers of other Christian denominations, and directly from their published writings. I see nothing in the history of Christianity to lead us to conclude that it could have been maintained in the world without the support of a separate class peculiarly devoted to the business of religious instruction and religious consolation. Assuming then the necessity of a body of clergy for the support of religion, two important

questions arise—how are they to be trained for their office, and how are they to be supported in their exercise of it? It will scarcely be denied that it is desirable that the clergy should enjoy the advantage of the best education which the country affords. Religion being the most important concern of all classes, those to whom its support and extension are mainly committed should be able to mix with all on terms of at least intellectual equality. The ill-educated and poorly informed teacher will seldom give instruction with much effect to those who have had greatly the advantage of him in intellectual training. There are doubtless many instances of individuals of very limited acquaintance with science and literature who are nevertheless mighty in the Scriptures, and well qualified to be the instructors of those who have not enjoyed the advantage of a superior education. Neither can it be denied that many persons may be found among the highly educated classes whose minds are so happily disciplined as to render them willing to receive religious instruction from those who are, intellectually considered, greatly their inferiors; but these are rare exceptions, and in general to give effectual instruction to the learned, the teacher must himself be learned. Now, when we consider how great is the influence exerted by those who have received a superior education on the rest of the community, we can scarcely overrate the importance of enlisting them on the side of religion. To this class belong a very large majority of persons of rank, and a large proportion of the wealthier classes of society. The desire to advance in wealth and rank is almost universal; and the disposition to follow the example

of those who occupy exalted stations or enjoy great riches is nearly as general. The placing of the clergy in a state of intellectual equality with the higher and wealthier classes of the country is, however, by no means the only reason why it is desirable that they should have the advantage of a superior education. The very nature of their occupation requires it. We have in our hands all the books of the New Testament (with perhaps one exception) in the language in which they were originally written, that is, in Greek. It seems indeed probable that St. Matthew's gospel was originally Hebrew, and that our Greek gospel is an early translation of it; but this is not certain, and if a Hebrew gospel of St. Matthew really existed, it has been long lost, and our Greek version is the nearest approach to it which we possess. No one will deny that an acquaintance with the original of any book whatever will enable a reader to understand it better than merely reading a translation. Now, it is certainly desirable that a Christian teacher should be thoroughly conversant with the New Testament, the great institute of our religion. Although we Gentile Christians are under no obligation to yield obedience to the Jewish law, and therefore with large portions of the Old Testament we have little to do, yet every Christian will admit that the older portions of the Scriptures have strong claims to our attention, and to study them to the greatest advantage, a knowledge of Hebrew, in which they were written, is necessary. A knowledge of Latin is required, as some of the best commentaries on the Scriptures are written in that language, and also much respecting ecclesiastical history, with which a clergyman should

be acquainted. Little, however, need be said on this subject, as instruction in Latin is invariably part of a liberal education. On the whole, we may safely assert, that every clergyman should be competently acquainted with Latin, and with the Greek of the New Testament; and that a considerable acquaintance with classical Greek and with Hebrew, although not absolutely essential, is very desirable. With respect to other branches of knowledge, a clergyman will certainly not possess the full weight which should attach to his character if he be notoriously deficient in the current information of the age in which he lives.

Another important consideration respecting the clergy is, that the means of living should be secured to them. A clergyman occupies the station of a gentleman, and therefore should possess an income adequate to support him in that station, to provide a fund for charities to which he is expected to contribute a larger portion than laymen of the same amount of income, and to make a reasonable provision for his family. It is, no doubt, true that individuals have existed in different ages since the first promulgation of Christianity who have devoted themselves exclusively to the promoting of the cause of religion, and lived in a state of voluntary privation and poverty. These were indeed the "salt of the earth;" but they are rare exceptions in human character, and it would be absurd to found a general rule on those exceptional cases. It may be reasonably expected that the characters of the clergy would be superior in general to those of the laity, and I have no doubt that such is the fact; but it would indicate a limited acquaintance with human nature to expect

to find a very high degree of piety and virtue common in any large class of men whatever. In order then to give a just influence to the clergy, it is necessary to invest them with those adventitious incidents which naturally tend to secure attention and respect from the other classes of society. While, however, a decent competence should be secured to the clergy, it is by no means to be wished in general that they should be endowed with a large share of worldly possessions. Great riches usually lead to a luxurious mode of living, and an inordinate love of ease and pleasure, which are calculated to undermine and destroy all that is most elevated and excellent in human character.

As a clergyman is to instruct others in religion, it is obviously essential to the adequate fulfilling of his office that he should himself be well instructed. • He should therefore be placed in such a situation as will be likely to induce him to study the Scriptures freely, impartially, and seriously, for the purpose of discovering truth, and not for that of supporting and fortifying preconceived notions. It is also to be desired that, at least, the leading characters among the clergy should be largely acquainted with theological literature, and should also be well informed in general literature and science, almost every branch of which may be made subsidiary to religion.

We have now, I think, got thus far : 1, that there should be a body of men set apart and properly educated for the office of religious teachers ; 2, that they should be provided with a competency ; 3, that they should be placed in circumstances favourable to the impartial study of the Scriptures, and to the acqui-

sition of such knowledge as may enable them to discharge efficiently the duties of Christian instruction.

There are three modes in which religion may, as to its external condition, exist in any country. There may be a religion established by law, to which all the inhabitants shall be obliged to conform, or be subject to punishment for non-conformity; or there may be an established religion with liberty to those who cannot conscientiously join it to dissent, either with or without the loss or infringement of their civil rights; or religion may be left to sustain itself by its own intrinsic excellence, without any aid or support from the state, which is commonly called the voluntary system. It is plain that the first-mentioned state of things is altogether inconsistent with the right of private judgment in religion, which has been asserted throughout the whole of this work. The question lies between the second and the third plans.

It is proper in this place to advert to an objection of the supporters of the voluntary principle, that governments are appointed for secular purposes only, and consequently that they have no right whatever to interfere in matters appertaining to religion. It seems to me essential to the validity of this argument that spiritual and secular things are not only distinct in their respective natures, but that the former can have no relation to, or bearing on the latter. Such, however, is not the fact. It cannot be denied that the temporal good of a nation greatly depends on the people regulating their conduct by the rules of morality; and it is quite clear that moral duties are enforced, and that the motives to practise them are

strengthened by the hopes and fears which are the natural results of faith in religion. Honesty undoubtedly tends to the benefit of society, and taking away and appropriating the property of another is an offence against the law in every country in the world. Now, when religion teaches that stealing the property of another is a sin, for which the offender is liable to punishment by the Great Ruler of all in a future state, how can it be denied that the belief in this liability affords a strong inducement to the believer to deter him from the commission of the act? The same view may be justly taken with respect to many other offences against the law. Religion then is of the greatest importance to the temporal well-being of the community; and therefore, even on the narrow principle stated above, the civil power is not only warranted, but called upon to support the cause of religion. But we must go further than this, and discuss the validity of the maxim, that the civil power has only to do with the temporal good of a nation, and is not warranted in interfering in matters of religion. Let us, in the first place, inquire what is the nature and character of the state, in other words, of the supreme power of a nation. The lawful origin of government springs from the necessities and wants of human nature. It is necessary for the well-being of man that the weak should be protected against the aggressions of the strong; that the right of property should be established, and that its enjoyment should be secured. No one individual in any country has abstractedly a right to govern others; but as it is impracticable, except in very small communities, that the powers of government can be exercised by all, each

country has established what is called a constitution, by which the powers of the state are vested in particular individuals, and which is either monarchical, oligarchical,* or democratic, or a combination of some or all of them. The state, then, is the aggregate of the powers of the community placed in the hands of particular individuals for the good of the whole people. It will not be denied by any Christian that every man is bound to do his best for the benefit of his fellow-creatures, and the same obligation obviously attaches to the state which is the representative and the depository of the power of the people. A virtuous individual feels that he ought to promote the moral as well as the physical good of his fellow-man, and that the former is the more important of the two, inasmuch as being exposed to indigence, and even dying of want, dreadful as those calamities are, is to be preferred to the most prosperous life spent in the indulgence of gross and heinous immoralities. Human benevolence therefore should be directed to the production of moral even in preference to physical good. But must we not, on the same principle, proceed a step further? If by religion the moral can be advanced to the Divine, if it be really in the power of the human race, by embracing the Christian religion and by regulating their conduct by its precepts, to prepare themselves for a state of eternal felicity in the world to come, can a benevolent man refrain from rendering such assistance as lies in his power in

* Aristocratical is the word commonly used, but I prefer "oligarchical," which properly means the government of a few. Aristocracy is the government of the best men, which, if it can be attained by any form, is the perfection of government.

advancing the unspeakably important interests of religion? The question answers itself. That then which is the duty of an individual according to his ability, must surely be alike incumbent on the state, which is the collective power of the whole nation. The only remaining question then is, What are the best means of promoting religion in a country? When the French minister Colbert asked some merchants what he could do to promote commerce, the answer was, "*Laissez nous faire.*" So say the supporters of the voluntary system: "Leave religion to itself; you will only do mischief by meddling with it." We will now proceed to the examination of this question.

We must here call to mind that we have to secure three objects: a learned education of the ministers of religion; an adequate provision for them; and such a state of circumstances as will lead them to an assiduous and impartial study of the Scriptures, other theological works, and such parts of literature and science as may be made subsidiary to the cause of religion. I shall in the first instance treat these important subjects abstractedly, without reference to the particular state of the country in which we live; and then consider how far the conclusions to which I am led should be modified in their application to the existing condition of the United Kingdom.

With regard to the first head, it must always be in the power of the state in all countries to secure for those intended for the Christian ministry the advantage of a learned education, and to exclude from the ministry such as shall not prove themselves qualified for the exercise of its functions. And as the state has the power, so there appears no reason to suppose

that it will not have the will to do this. A statesman must be blind, indeed, not to perceive that religion affords the most stable support to government; that the religious man will in general best fulfil the public and private duties of life; and will contribute most to advance the happiness of the community, and thereby increase its attachment to the constitution. But if these matters be left to the private exertions of individuals, what security have we that such beneficial results will ensue? I find nothing in history to lead me to indulge in such an anticipation. The state of religious opinion, and still more of religious feeling, is ever varying. Sometimes a strong fanatical feeling becomes very prevalent; at others a great regard to rites, ceremonies, and external observances, with very little to interest the heart and regulate the conduct. In the deplorable reign of Charles the Second a general spirit of irreligion prevailed throughout the land, led on by an abandoned and profligate court. Throughout the eighteenth century the spirit of religion in the upper and middle ranks was cold and lifeless; although the lower classes were awakened to its importance by the powerful exertions of the Wesleys, Whitfield, and other Methodists. However strong reasons persons of serious and reflecting minds may think they have for rejecting some of the dogmas of these teachers, I can scarcely think that any impartial person can deny that we owe them great obligations for their successful efforts in implanting the fear of God and a sense of duty in thousands of minds which had previously led a life of profligacy without God in the world. If there had been in the reign of Charles the Second no

established church, I cannot see what could have prevented uncontrolled profligacy throughout the country. I may, indeed, be reminded of the excellent men who conscientiously resigned their preferments on the passing of the Act of Uniformity, and of the exertions of those and other dissenting teachers amid the persecutions to which they were exposed. I wish to give all honour to the memory of those illustrious English confessors, but their history cannot be said to have a legitimate bearing on our present subject, for they were bred in the church, and enjoyed the advantage of the learned education which she has provided for her sons. Those who are acquainted with the great difficulties which the most flourishing bodies of dissenters in this country have had to contend with in providing the means of education for their ministers, cannot, I apprehend, hesitate to admit that on this branch of our inquiry the advantage is entirely on the side of a religious establishment.

The next question is, whether by a national establishment or on the voluntary principle a decent subsistence for the clergy will be best secured. I hardly can think that any reflecting person can entertain a serious doubt on this subject. In this country a tenth part of the produce of the soil is set apart for the support of the clergy*. In arguing the general question, indeed, we are not at liberty to avail ourselves of this fact. In every country, however, it is and always must be in the power of those who exercise the supreme authority to make such provision for the clergy as they may deem necessary, and as the

* A considerable portion, however, of the tithes has been diverted from its legitimate purpose, and is now in the hands of laymen.

particular circumstances of the nation at the time may admit of and require. I can find no reason to expect that this would be done on the voluntary principle. Let us look to the condition of the dissenters in this country. Those members of the dissenting denominations who contribute to the support of their ministers give proofs of a conscientious adherence to their religious profession by voluntarily paying money in support of it, which burden they might avoid by conforming to the established church. In all countries where a particular form of religion is established, the dissidents from it must be more conscientious than the bulk of those who adhere to it, for the plain reason, that those who care little for religion, and profess it chiefly because attendance on religious worship is the general practice of the country, and because refraining from attending would incur a loss of respectability, will naturally attach themselves to the established church in preference to any dissenting sect. The temptations to relinquish dissent and to join the establishment have been found so powerful, by those who have attained wealth and station in society, as to have led one whose character and writings did honour to the religious denomination to which she belonged*, to observe that she had never known a family keep a carriage for three generations and remain dissenters. The dissenters then at large may be fairly considered as a conscientious body. Do they then or do they not support their ministers on so liberal a scale as to place them on an equality in point of income with the clergy of the establishment? Without having the means to ascertain this distinctly

* Mrs. Barbauld.

as a matter of fact, it is my firm conviction, drawn from general observation, that this question must be answered in the negative. I believe that a large majority of the dissenting clergy are very poorly provided for ; and that their situation in point of income is much inferior to that of the clergy of the established church. We often hear much of the scanty stipends of curates ; and these complaints may perhaps be well-founded. But be that as it may, we must bear in mind that in general a curacy is only the first stage in a clergyman's life, and that but few remain curates throughout their whole lives. I suspect, however, that a larger proportion of dissenting ministers, compared with the whole body, than the number of curates in proportion to the vicars, rectors, and dignified clergy, receive smaller stipends than the curates, and have a worse chance of bettering their condition. I regret being under the necessity of resorting to conjecture on this subject ; but still it is founded on such observations as can hardly fail to lead to a conclusion which is in the main right. Dissenting ministers, even among the most wealthy sects, are, I believe, in general very poorly paid ; and it seems a strong fact to show that this is the case, that members of the wealthy families among the dissenters are very rarely brought up to the ministry. A considerable proportion of the clergy of the church of England are sons of noblemen and of persons of rank, station, and fortune. If the incomes of dissenting teachers made any near approach to that of the clergy of the church, the sons of wealthy dissenters would assuredly be brought up to the ministry much more frequently than they now are.

Another important circumstance is required to be taken into consideration, the mode in which the provision for the clergy is made. Under this head two incalculable advantages will be found on the side of the established church, the independence and the permanence of the provision. The clergyman, when he is admitted to his living, has a provision for life; the dissenting minister will retain his income only so long as his services are acceptable to the subscribers by whom he is paid. The former has no anxiety about the future; the latter is in continual danger of losing the means of his subsistence. I shall have to consider presently what effect this difference in their circumstances will probably lead to in the performance of their duties: suffice it to say here, that the situation of the clergyman, in the point of view in which we are at present considering it, appears to be far preferable to that of the dissenting minister.

We have now arrived at the last subject of our inquiry respecting what should be the situation of a Christian teacher. He should, if possible, be so circumstanced as to be left at liberty to study the Scriptures with impartiality. The importance of this object no Protestant can deny. Whether it can be practically attained requires serious consideration. Many of the supporters of the voluntary principle consider themselves on high ground here; and that their strength lies chiefly in this part of the question. Indeed the larger part of them would probably admit that the first and second questions, which we have discussed respecting the education and the support of the clergy, must be decided against them; and that their case rests on this third branch of our inquiry.

Their argument may, I think, be fairly stated as follows. If you have a church established by law, its doctrines and its discipline must be enforced on all its members; and as the church system will of necessity be the work of fallible men, we must expect that it will contain some things which are erroneous. These errors may be exposed and confuted by learned and able men; but as the church system is, as it were, stereotyped in a form from which it is held an offence to deviate, the errors are perpetuated; and there appears to be no hope of their ever being corrected. If, on the other hand, we reject all creeds and articles, every man will be left to study the Scriptures for himself, and the cause of religious truth cannot fail to be benefited by the free action of independent minds. All this sounds well, and the former part is undeniably true; but the state of things contemplated in the latter part does not exist; and I shall proceed to show the reasons which have induced me to think that it never can exist. The supposition is, that a man can commence his studies for the Christian ministry with strict impartiality, and without a bias on his mind in favour of any one of the churches or sects into which the Christian world is divided. This seems to be an impossibility. At however early an age our supposed student may commence the studies which are to prepare him for the ministry, a considerable period of his life must have previously elapsed. How has this been spent? No one, I presume, expects that the future minister is to be absolutely without religion till the moment when he sits down to study for the ministry. He must then have been in the habit of attending some place of religious

worship, and of receiving religious instruction at home from his parents or others. He must also have had intimate connexions with some class of persons or other; and the probability is, that his associates will have been chiefly those who agree in the main with the sentiments of his parents. All these things will necessarily tend to give him a strong bias in favour of a particular modification of the Christian religion. This is not only unavoidable, but its existence is most desirable, and even essential to a young man who aspires to the sacred office of a Christian minister. A man cannot enter on the study of religion as he may on that of geometry or chemistry. Religion addresses itself to the whole man. It is not a mere matter of reasoning. The whole heart and soul must be engaged and deeply interested in it. Every religious parent will desire to implant pious feelings and sentiments in the minds and hearts of his children at the very earliest period when they are capable of receiving them. Few, I presume, will be found who will not admit the age of eighteen to be quite as early as a young man should be called upon to direct his principal attention to those studies which are to prepare him for the Christian ministry. If he has been religiously educated, how much of religious sentiment and habit must he then have acquired, and how strong an attachment to the particular church or sect in which he has been brought up? And is it really to be expected that all this will be laid aside from the moment when he commences his study of the Scriptures; and that the Episcopalian, the Presbyterian and the Independent, the Calvinist and the Arminian, the Trinitarian and the Unitarian, will sit down

to read the Bible free from a bias in favour of any of the doctrines and opinions indicated by the words used above? No one can be so entirely unacquainted with human nature, and so little observant of what passes around him, as to believe this possible. No man can possibly enter on the study of the Scriptures without a predilection in favour of some particular view of Christianity. All that the wisest and best parents and instructors can do is to inculcate and promote in their children and pupils, to the utmost of their power, the love of truth, in the hope that it will, in the end, prove too powerful for all bias and prepossession.

It must also be observed, that the free inquiry which is only to extend to the short period devoted to those studies which are immediately preparatory to the exercise of the Christian ministry, cannot be reasonably expected to produce any very important results; we must therefore follow our student in his career after he has taken upon himself the office of a Christian teacher. By this time he must have adopted some particular views of Christianity; and his object must be to connect himself with persons professing sentiments similar to his own. It is nothing to the purpose to say, that congregations may be found among the dissenters who acknowledge no allegiance to any creed or formula of faith composed by fallible men, and who profess to derive their doctrines from the Scriptures alone, which every one is allowed to interpret for himself. But although these congregations have no creed expressed in words, it is absolutely essential to their existence, as Christian societies, that there should be an implied agree-

ment among their members. Without this, religion would be a mere name, or at most, a matter of outward observance. It is certainly possible to conceive that a number of individuals may think it respectable to attend some place of religious worship, and that the keeping up of such places is beneficial to the public; and, at the same time, may be indifferent as to the doctrines inculcated. But with such persons religion is merely political; and the most enlarged charity cannot class them among religious men. That which is addressed to the head exclusively, and does not affect the heart, can never deserve the honoured and hallowed name of religion. True religion addresses itself to the moral sentiments and feelings, and supplies the spiritual wants of man. It elevates, purifies, spiritualises. A Christian congregation, which has no specific views of Christianity, is an absurdity. If it could exist at all (which seems incredible), there is absolutely nothing to secure for it more than a very short duration. It would speedily, in the nature of things, vanish away, and be seen no more. Every Christian congregation has, in truth, its own peculiar scheme of doctrine, which its minister must inculcate; or he will be obliged to relinquish his situation. Nothing more absurd can be imagined, than that a religious society should have a permanent, or indeed more than a very short existence, in which the minister should feel himself perfectly at liberty to espouse either side of the controversies which divide and agitate the Christian world.

Supposing, then, our student now to have become a minister of a congregation professing the utmost liberality, and asserting most strongly the right of

free inquiry in religion, he can, if he act with honour and integrity, hold his situation no longer than he agrees in the leading doctrines of his congregation ; and if he should remain in it and promulgate opinions inconsistent with those doctrines, a withdrawal of the subscriptions of his hearers would speedily deprive him of his means of subsistence. The result of the investigation is, that every minister of religion, whether of an established church or of a dissenting sect, must necessarily be placed in circumstances which are calculated to pre-engage his mind in favour of some particular views of Christian doctrine ; and that his interpretation of the Scriptures will, in general, be greatly biased by such predisposition.

Is then the cause of religious truth absolutely hopeless ; and must the Christian world go on in a course of perpetual controversy without making any real advance ? I hope and I think not ; but those who labour for the advancement of religious truth, will probably always be few. Some, however, may be found in every age, in whose minds the love of truth is paramount. These will go on calmly and fearlessly examining the foundations of their faith ; relinquishing by degrees what may appear to them to be erroneous ; and availing themselves of all the means in their power, from whatever quarter, to assist them in the search after religious truth. It is deeply to be regretted that very few laymen appear to engage their minds and employ their time in religious inquiry ; as they are much more likely to give an *unbiased* attention to the subject than a minister of religion, or one who aspires to that station, can be in general expected to do.

Free inquiry in religion is one of the noblest pursuits of the human mind, and it has been most beneficial in its results ; but it has unhappily fallen into disrepute with many serious and truly religious persons. This seems mainly attributable to the manner in which it has been too often conducted. Its supporters have frequently been represented as leaning too much to their own understanding, led on by inordinate self-conceit, and despising those who were wiser and better than themselves. That these charges are, for the most part, greatly exaggerated, and when applied to many individuals, wholly unfounded, cannot be truly denied ; but the manner in which religious investigations have been conducted, has often given plausibility to the accusations. The *right* is derived from the *duty* of free inquiry. Those who believe that the Almighty has blessed his human creatures with a revelation of his will, must admit that it is the duty of those who have access to the Sacred Volume in which the revelation is contained, to employ their faculties in its study, and to use their best exertions to understand its contents. We can have no rational expectation of understanding any book, unless we study it ; and it is obvious, that freedom and impartiality are the conditions of the mind the most likely to enable us to attain our object. But if it is our duty freely to inquire, the right of free inquiry naturally flows from it, as no one can deny that we have a right to do what our duty requires of us.

It may not be amiss to make a few remarks here on the subject of free inquiry ; what it is concerning which we wish to inquire, and in what manner and

with what limitations our inquiries should be conducted. All Christians admit the Divine authority of Christ and of the early teachers who were appointed and authorised by him to promulgate his religion in the world. It is also admitted that the instructions of Jesus Christ and his disciples are contained in the New Testament. To that book, then, and to such parts of the Old Testament as are properly applied to the condition of Gentile Christians, that is to all except converts to Christianity from Judaism, we are to look for instruction in revealed truth. The Scriptures, however, are known to the great majority of the Christian world only in translations from the languages in which they were written. These translations are very numerous, and differ considerably in many passages. It becomes therefore the duty of those who are competent to the task to have recourse to the original Scriptures in order to ascertain their meaning. But here arises a difficulty. The existing printed versions are translations from ancient manuscripts; but besides these, many others of great antiquity, as well as other ancient writings, which it is not necessary to enumerate here, but of which full accounts may be found in the works of learned divines, are in existence, and a considerable variety is found in the language of these ancient authorities. It has been the labour of a large portion of the lives of many eminent scholars to examine the manuscripts in question, to estimate their respective importance, and to bring before the public the result of their labours in the shape of new editions of the Scriptures. The learned student cannot fail to derive great assistance from the labours of these men; and those who

can only read the Scriptures in their own languages will easily meet with summaries of the arguments in support of any particular reading. Amid all the different readings and discrepancies of the MSS., I do not believe that anything is to be found at all affecting those great leading doctrines which I have endeavoured to show it was the principal object of our Saviour to inculcate ; and which were intended to promote the cause of piety and virtue in this world ; and to prepare the human race for the beatitudes of that which is to come. Every one should do his best to understand the volume of Divine truth ; the learned by studying the original, the unlearned by reading translations, and by availing themselves, as they have opportunities, of the labours of the learned.

Unspeakably important is the disposition in which we engage in the task of free inquiry. Unless this be done with a pious and humble mind, we can have no reason to hope for the blessing of God on our inquiries. If we pursue them in the hope of finding the means of evading any Christian duty, or with a vain-glorious desire of acquiring a character of superior learning or ability, we shall probably heap error upon error, and find ourselves at last in a condition far inferior to that of the humble unlearned Christian, who believes as he has been taught, and regulates his conduct by the love of God and the love of man, and practises all the personal virtues. Let me, however, not be understood to represent a free inquiry into the meaning of the Scriptures as a small matter. To it we owe the great reformation in religion ; and by means of it the more intelligent and informed Christians have had their minds freed from

much which perplexed and troubled the ablest and most learned men of former times. The world has never, even in the best times, fully imbibed the true spirit of Christianity. Even the apostles, the chosen companions of Jesus, we have seen were far from having attained that exalted spirituality which characterises the Divine teaching of their Master. In proportion as intelligence has advanced in this world, more pure and exalted views of Christianity have prevailed. Jesus Christ is the instructor of all ages. He pours a sweet drop into the bitter cup which the uninstructed and degraded negro is doomed to drink ; and checks by his heavenly wisdom the vain speculations of the self-glorifying philosopher. His words may, for the most part, be easily understood ; but who has fully imbibed his spirit ? The study of his teachings, and of those of his chosen disciples, accompanied by earnest prayer, are the best means of attaining it. Were Christianity really established in the world, war, tyranny, oppression, profaneness, intemperance, impurity, would cease to exist ; and thus the most fruitful sources of corruption and wretchedness would at once be stopped.

From this (I hope it will not be thought unnecessary) digression respecting free inquiry, we will return to the important subject of the best means of supporting and advancing religion. For the reasons stated in the foregoing pages, I conclude that a religious establishment is to be preferred to what is generally called the voluntary system, that is, to leaving religion to be supported by the voluntary exertions of individuals without any interference by the state. Two most important questions arise here : 1, what should be the doctrines and form of the esta-

blishment ; and, 2, what is the duty of the supreme power of the state towards those who dissent from it, and set up churches of their own ?

Those who agree in the principle laid down in this work, that every man has a right to follow the dictates of conscience in matters of religion, and that there is no infallible judge of religious truth on earth, must admit, that as no church establishment can possess infallibility, it follows that none can have a right to condemn and punish those who deny its dogmas, and refuse to submit to its authority. All such interference must be condemned as unjust and tyrannical.

Church establishment we have considered to be a powerful means of supporting and advancing Christianity. I have endeavoured to point out in former parts of this work what was the leading object of Christ's coming into the world. The 16th verse of the 3rd chapter of St. John's gospel is a complete summary of the Christian religion: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Christianity has its origin in the love of God ; it is carried on and perfected by the mission of his Son Jesus Christ ; and its end is the conferring of everlasting life on the faithful followers of the Saviour. Let us examine closely this remarkable text. "God so loved the world ;" this is the first branch, and it clearly shows that the origin of the Christian religion was the love of God to his human creatures. If anything shall be found in any formula of faith, or in the profession of any church or sect, inconsistent with this doctrine, it is a departure

from what was taught by the disciple whom Jesus loved. That God gave his only-begotten Son to redeem the world, is the common creed of Christendom, and requires no particular comment. The third branch of the text, "whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," leads to the consideration of what is to be understood by believing in Christ. Whoever seriously studies the New Testament cannot fail to perceive that by faith is to be understood much more than a mere assent to the truth of the gospel dispensation. Faith is the vivifying principle of the Christian religion, comprising a full conviction of its truth, an entire trust in its promises, and an unshaken fidelity to its precepts. The necessary result of such a faith is obedience to the commands of God. He who lives in habitual disobedience to God's laws, although he may assent to the truth of the Christian religion, cannot be said, in a scriptural sense, to have faith. I shall not quote particular texts in proof of the accuracy of this explanation of the word faith, but I refer the candid reader to the general tenor of the New Testament, and particularly to the writings of St. Paul. There is in reality no inconsistency between the doctrine of faith, and that of the necessity of good works, or, in other words, obedience to God's laws, to secure our salvation. This obedience naturally and necessarily flows from a true faith. The mind of him who has the true faith of a Christian must be deeply penetrated with a sense of the goodness of God; must receive the message of salvation with heartfelt gratitude, and with love and veneration for him who came to seek and to save that which was lost; and

must love all that is good and pure and holy, and reject and detest that which is evil. Weak and inconsistent he may be, and from the frailty of his nature and the strength of temptation he may commit many offences against God's laws; but that he should live in contempt of them, and in the general course of his life disobey them, is impossible. The man who so lives, whatever his speculative opinions may be, has certainly not the faith of a Christian. In this view of the subject, we may see that religious faith will exist in different degrees in the minds of different individuals. The lowest is the mere assent of the understanding to the truth of the Christian religion. But this falls far short of the faith by which the Christian becomes entitled to the promise of salvation. Between the bare assent of the understanding and that faith which acts on the mind with all the force of certainty, are many degrees; and every really religious man will strive with all his force, and avail himself of every means in his power, and above all, of earnest prayer, to rise from a lower to a higher faith, till he has attained that state which excludes all doubt and hesitation. Would a man examine the state of his mind as to his faith, let him consider whether he holds the great truths of religion with the same unhesitating confidence as he gives to historical and geographical facts not within his knowledge; as that Hannibal and Cæsar existed many ages ago; and that Pekin, which he has never seen, is really a city in China. Another and a more practical test of the strength of our faith is a searching inquiry into our motives of action, whether the hopes and fears respecting the world to come have the same

degree of assurance in our minds as those which belong to the present life. Do we feel equally confident that our condition for weal or woe in the future state will depend on our character and conduct here, as that extravagance and neglect of business will probably lead to poverty and indigence, that intemperance will destroy our health, and that gross violations of the law will lead to severe punishment? Even if we can answer these questions affirmatively, we may still not have attained the perfection of the Christian faith, which consists in an entire acquiescence in the will of God at all times and under all circumstances, and a firm conviction that he will always do that which is wisest and best for ourselves and for all his creatures. This is the state towards which all who bear the Christian name should be constantly and earnestly striving. Very few, it is to be feared, make any near approach to it; and, looking to the actual state of mankind, we may be tempted to ask by what degree of Christian faith man may be entitled to the benefits of the gospel promises. Such an inquiry is dangerous, and no one should indulge in it. The business of every Christian is to press forward to higher degrees of faith, in the hope of attaining the highest; and in the course of his progress to rely on the mercy of him "who desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he would turn from his wickedness and live."

What has been said respecting faith cannot be properly considered as a departure from the subject in hand, a national establishment, since the object of such an establishment is the support of the Christian faith. We will now proceed to consider how that

great object can be best obtained. Previously to inquiring what a church establishment ought to be, it will be desirable to bear in mind what it should not be. If it be true that all Christians have a right to read the Scriptures for themselves, and to form their own conclusions as to the meaning of the Sacred Writings, and that no power on earth can lawfully dictate to any individual what he is to believe, which I have already endeavoured fully to prove from the New Testament, it follows that all condemnation of others on account of their holding different interpretations of the Scriptures from those professed by any particular church, and charging them with a religious offence under the name of heresy, is totally unwarranted. So again it must, on the principle set forth above, be left to the choice of every individual, whether he will attach himself to any particular church or not, and no church has a right to bring a charge of schism against him who refuses to join its communion; or who, having formerly been a member of it, withdraws from it. Are the words heresy and schism then without meaning? Certainly not. They denote great offences, of which numbers have been guilty; but they cannot be properly applied to merely erroneous opinion where there has been no evil intention. Whoever is led into error in religion by worldly interest, or by any evil inclination, is guilty of heresy. He that separates himself from the communion of a church of which he is a member, from personal dislike of any of those who exercise authority in it, for the purpose of forwarding any ambitious or interested purpose, or from any evil desire whatever, is guilty of schism. "Schism," says the ever-memorable John Hales, "is

nothing else but an unnecessary separation of Christians from that part of the visible church of which they were once members." The guilt of heresy and schism then are real; but I do not see how any human being can pronounce that they have been incurred in any particular instance. They must be left to the Searcher of hearts. Let every man seriously, and with a deep sense of religious obligation, examine himself, and take every precaution in his power to prevent his being actuated by any worldly and unhallowed motive in rejecting or adopting any particular doctrine, or in withdrawing himself from the communion of the particular church to which he belongs; but having fully satisfied his conscience on this head, let him openly profess what he believes to be Christian truth; and exercise his own free judgment as to the church or sect with which he thinks it best to connect himself. An established church then should not directly or impliedly assume to itself the attribute of infallibility; and should not charge those who deny its doctrines with heresy, or those who withdraw from its communion with schism. By such assumptions it takes to itself powers which belong to none on earth; and which are so far from being authorised by the Saviour of the world, as to be at variance with his command.

Having settled in our own minds what an established church should not be, let us next consider what it ought to be. The purpose for which it is instituted is the support of the Christian religion. The three principal things to be considered are the doctrines, the means and mode of instruction, and the discipline of the church. On the first head I

have devoted a large part of this work to an inquiry what was the great purpose of Christ's mission ; and what were the leading doctrines taught by him and his disciples. Those who agree in my conclusions will think that, as Christianity was intended for all, it may be understood by all ; and that those who make it "a cunning thing to be a Christian," depart lamentably from the plain intelligible doctrines taught by its first promulgators. If those doctrines were deemed sufficient for them, it is difficult to understand why they are not enough for all times. Unhappily the mind of man has too frequently been urged by its restlessness to employ its leisure in speculating and refining on matters of religion, forming systems of faith, and insisting on dogmas hard to be understood, and, when received, not at all calculated to promote the great cause of piety and virtue. Thus the skill and learning of divines have been often employed to support abstruse and difficult doctrines, generally drawn from the more obscure parts of Scripture, and requiring a great expenditure of time and thought to understand them ; and, while the head has been taxed to the utmost of its powers, the heart and the affections have been in a great measure neglected. Nor is even this the worst part of the case : the blindest bigotry, and an absolute abandonment of Christian charity have been too often characteristics of those who have engaged in theological controversy. I am happy to find my views of this subject strongly corroborated by the excellent writer whom I have lately quoted. "It hath been," says Hales, "the common disease of Christians from the beginning, not to content themselves with that measure of faith which

God and the Scriptures have expressly afforded us ; but out of a vain desire to know more than is revealed, they have attempted to discuss things of which we can have no light, neither from reason nor revelation ; neither have they rested here,* but upon pretence of church authority, which is none, or tradition, which for the most part is but pigment, they have peremptorily concluded, and confidently imposed upon others, a necessity of entertaining conclusions of that nature ; and to strengthen themselves, have broken out into divisions and factions, opposing man to man, synod to synod, till the peace of the church vanished, without all possibility of recal." Such are the sentiments of an able writer and excellent man of the seventeenth century. Let us now attend to an author of great ability of the eighteenth. "If," says Paley,† "it be deemed expedient to establish a national religion, that is to say, one sect in preference to all others, some test, by which the teachers of that sect may be distinguished from the teachers of different sects, appears to be an indispensable consequence. The existence of such an establishment supposes it, and the very notion of a national religion includes that of a test. But this necessity, which is real, hath, according to the fashion of human affairs, furnished to almost every church a pretence for extending, multiplying, and continuing such tests beyond what the occasion justified. For though some purposes of order and tranquillity may

* These words, we are told by an excellent and highly respected living author, "he afterwards slightly qualified." Hallam's *Literature of Europe*, 1803, chap. ii. p. 80. I do not know where this qualification is to be found.

† Moral Philosophy, book vi. chap. x. : Of Religious Establishments and Toleration.

be answered by the establishment of creeds and confessions, yet they are all at times attended with serious inconveniences: they check inquiry; they violate liberty; they ensnare the consciences of the clergy, by holding out temptations to prevarication; however they may express the persuasion, or be accommodated to the controversies or to the fears of the age in which they are composed, in process of time, and by reason of the changes which are wont to take place in the judgment of mankind upon religious subjects, they come at length to contradict the actual opinions of the church whose doctrines they profess to contain; and they often perpetuate the proscription of sects and tenets, from which any danger has long ceased to be apprehended."

Fortified by the sentiments of these eminent writers, and by those of many others who might be easily adduced, and after full consideration of the subject, I cannot hesitate in expressing my own conviction that the doctrine professed by an established church should be that which was first taught by our Saviour and his disciples; that it should be expressed in plain and unequivocal terms; and that all beyond this should be left for each individual to decide for himself. The argument for a more elaborate creed is that it produces unanimity. There can be no doubt that it was intended to have this effect, but it is equally certain that the attempt has signally failed. Even within the pale of the pretended infallible church of Rome there has always been much diversity of opinion. Within a very short time a great division has taken place in the church of Scotland, and a very large portion of its members have left it and set up a free church.

As to the church of England, we have seen that a late writer has divided its members into three classes, which he has denominated High Church, Low Church, and Broad Church; he has also made subdivisions of each, and although all may not agree in his classifications, none can doubt the reality of a great diversity of religious opinion among the clergy of the established church. It was this vain attempt to procure unanimity which led to a recent memorable event which no religious mind can think of without deep concern and regret: I mean what is called the Gorham controversy. Both parties agreed that baptism was obligatory on the whole Christian world, and that Divine grace was the gift of God to man. Surely we might have expected that an agreement in such important doctrines would be a sufficient bond of union. But no; it was not thought enough to acknowledge that to baptize was a Christian duty, and to practise it; and that Divine grace was an inestimable blessing, and humbly to hope and pray for it; but they must also know precisely *how* baptism operated, and *how* grace produced its effect; and for this cause Christian charity was outraged, courts of justice were resorted to, and a charge of heresy was made by one party against the other. Should these things be so in a Christian land? Can any good be expected to arise directly or indirectly from this controversy, commensurate with the evil of angry passions, and the outrage of Christian charity which accompanied it?

The doctrine then to be professed by an established church should be plain and simple; and it seems desirable that it should be expressed in Scripture

language. But it may be said that this leaves room for unseemly controversies among the clergy, which would excite those feelings of bigotry and uncharitableness which have been already denounced. That this can be entirely prevented I will not undertake to say. The bad passions of man will sometimes burst out, do what we will to restrain them ; but that much occasion for controversy would be taken away by the plan of an established church here proposed, seems to admit of no reasonable doubt. We must, however, fully to grasp the subject, enter on our second head of the means and mode of instruction to be adopted in the church. It will not be necessary to say more than that it is the indispensable duty of a clergyman to give religious instruction, and to administer religious consolation in private to his parishioners as they may stand in need of his assistance. I shall confine myself to the subject of the public services of the church. It would be useless to discuss the question of a settled form of prayer and what is commonly called free prayer, that is, such as the minister shall compose himself, or select from the compositions of others, because I consider a liturgy absolutely necessary in a church constituted in the manner which has been suggested. If every clergyman were to be allowed to use what prayers he thought proper, each religious sect in the country might find its representative in the established church ; and the most opposite doctrines might be indirectly inculcated from the reading-desk, as it should happen to be filled by the supporters of one or other of the religious parties in the country. This would lead to great confusion and uncertainty in the minds of the hearers, and thereby

weaken the impression which the services of the church should make on the mind and heart. To prevent such an evil consequence, there should be a fixed form of prayer. But how is such a liturgy to be made? The answer is plain. Let the Scriptures, particularly the New Testament, be laid open before the compilers of the liturgy; let them make free use of its language; and let its spirit breathe through whatever they add to it. Much may be found in existing forms and in the works of many pious writers, which would be of excellent use in forming a liturgy. It should be the especial care of the compilers to admit nothing which cannot be clearly supported by Scripture authority; and they ought, as far as they can conscientiously, to avoid inserting anything which shall give pain or offence to any serious Christian. Such a liturgy would be indeed a blessing; and would tend more to promote union among Christians than anything besides. One caution should be added, that the prayers should not be long. Nothing tends more to deaden the spirit of devotion than mere lip-service, when the mind is either listless or engaged on other subjects. We cannot for any length of time keep up in our minds the fervency required in prayer.

But it may be said, your plan of preventing conflicting opinions among the clergy by the use of a liturgy must fail, unless you abolish preaching altogether, or lay such restrictions on the preacher as would be quite inconsistent with your notion of religious liberty. In answer to this objection I must say that I do not think it practicable, or even desirable, in the present state of the Christian world, that all the clergy should be of one mind. The professors of

Christianity have still much to learn and much to unlearn; and free discussion is the means to clear our minds from error, and to advance us in the knowledge of Christian truth. These desirable discussions, however, may be carried on more satisfactorily, and to a much better purpose, by the press than in the pulpit. In few things do the thinking part of the Christian world more generally agree than in the inexpediency in general of controversial preaching. It is objectionable on two grounds: first, on account of its tendency to generate evil passions and uncharitableness; and secondly, because it deprives the hearers of those helps towards forming religious affections and religious habits which preaching should afford. Much of the ordinary maxims and the general practice of the world are at variance with the principles of the gospel which the preacher is bound to enforce. The great question with him is, How can I give the best assistance in my power to advance my hearers in the way of true religion? His business is to warn them against all sins, and particularly those which most prevail in the age in which he lives; to excite their devotional feelings; and to address himself to the purest and best principles of our nature. Controversial preaching is apt to engender spiritual pride in the hearers from the opinion of their own orthodoxy, and a contempt of those whose opinions they are taught to consider erroneous and heretical. Although then, I do not consider it expedient, or even practicable, to exclude controversial preaching altogether, and I am even willing to admit that occasions may sometimes arise which render it necessary to resort to it, yet, I think, few reflecting persons will deny that

it should in general be discouraged. When, however, a great number of controverted points are admitted into the doctrines of the church, it must be expected that the clergy in their sermons will discuss those subjects. By confining the doctrine of the church to the plain and simple creed which we have seen is all that was required by Christ and his apostles to make a man a Christian, the incitement to preach polemical sermons is taken away. Controversial preaching then should in general be discouraged both by the precept and the example of those who have authority in the church; but the only restriction I would lay on the clergy is, that they should preach nothing inconsistent with their profession of belief in the doctrine mentioned above as plainly taught by our Saviour and his apostles, or with the liturgy of which, if it contained nothing but what was clearly justified by the teaching of Christ and his disciples, could not justly be complained of as any restriction on Christian liberty. It must be kept steadily in mind, that in the constitution of such a church as we have been contemplating, there is no assumption of a right in any one to make his own interpretation of Scripture binding on the consciences of others. I have endeavoured to prove that a national establishment of religion is a great good. Admitting this, it follows that the supreme power of the state ought to set up and support such an establishment. They will effect their purpose in the best manner by adopting such a plan as they believe will be most fitted to advance the cause of Christianity in the country. It is perfectly consistent with this to allow the fullest liberty of religious profession to all. Let every man be left to

follow the dictates of his own conscience in joining the establishment or dissenting from it; and if he choose the latter course, let it not expose him to any diminution of his civil rights; and there will then be no ground of complaint against the establishment.

With respect to the discipline of the church, nothing need be said here, but that it must be settled by the supreme powers of the state, who would call to their aid, both as to this and the other branches of an ecclesiastical establishment, those who, from large and profound acquaintance with the Scriptures, superior abilities, great experience, and religious and moral character, are best fitted for the work. In settling the discipline of the church nothing should be insisted on but what is really important; and the clergy should be allowed as much liberty as is consistent with the end for which they are appointed.

What has been hitherto advanced relates to a country where there exists no established religion; and this has been thought the best way of educating the just principle which should form and regulate an establishment. The principle once settled, we must find out how it should be modified in its application to the state of things in this country, where a religious establishment has long existed.

As many well-meaning but timid persons are alarmed at the suggestion of any alterations in the church, and as they seem to think that any change whatever would lead to its subversion, I will here insert a passage from the works of a high-churchman of the greatest ability: "The church," says Burke*, "like every body corporate, may alter her laws without

* Works, vol. x. p. 5.

changing her identity. As an independent church, professing fallibility, she has claimed a right of acting without the consent of any other; as a church, she claims, and has always exercised, a right of reforming whatever appeared amiss in her doctrine, her discipline, or her rites. She did so, when she shook off the papal supremacy in the reign of Henry the Eighth, which was an act of the body of the English church, as well as of the state (I don't inquire how obtained). She did so, when she cut off three articles from her original 42, and reduced them to the present 39; and she certainly would not lose her corporate identity, nor subvert her fundamental principles, though she were to leave ten of the 39 which remain, out of any future confession of her faith. She would limit her corporate powers, on the contrary, and she would oppose her fundamental principles, if she were to deny herself the prudential exercise of such a capacity of reformation."

I shall not presume to enter here into the important questions, whether any alterations should be made in the established church at the present day; and, if so, what those alterations should be; but I proceed to point out circumstances in the existing state of the country, which to my mind clearly indicate that some great change in ecclesiastical affairs must take place at no great distance of time. At the census of the population in 1851 arrangements were made to ascertain the number of persons who attended divine service at all the churches and chapels of the established church, of the Roman Catholics, and of the dissenters, as also the number of sittings in all places of religious worship, and some other matters. The

returns made under this regulation afford a valuable body of religious statistics. They are certainly far from furnishing evidence making a near approach to certainty as to the comparative number of those who belong to the established church, and those who are included in other denominations. They show, however, undeniably that a very large proportion of the population are not members of the establishment; and they lead to a reasonable conjecture that the members of the church of England do not greatly exceed half the population of the country. Here then arise questions of the greatest importance for the consideration of those who exercise the legislative and the executive powers of the country, of those who occupy influential stations in the church, and of every really sincere and pious Christian. Does the church give the best aid which circumstances will admit of to the great interests of Christianity? Is she secure from great danger, and is her present state such as can reasonably be expected to be permanent?

In order to give the proper answer to the first question, we must keep steadily in mind that the great object of an establishment of religion by law is the promotion of Christianity; and that the best mode of attaining this end is the thing to be considered. If it be desirable to advance Christianity at all, it must be so to do it to the greatest extent possible. If, then, any are excluded from the pale of the established church, who are acknowledged to profess all that is essential to Christianity, the benefit conferred by the church on the community is diminished in proportion to the numbers of those who are thus excluded. Even if we were to admit that one reli-

gious body was just as good as another, and that, provided Christianity be taught, its particular form is of no material importance (which, by the way, no one will admit), religious divisions occasion great inconvenience, and are no small impediment to the advancement of the cause of religion. In large towns, where the numbers of each religious sect are sufficient to enable them to support schools, and to afford all the requisite means for the support of religion to their own parties, the evil will be less felt; but even then it is by no means inconsiderable. The affections are developed, and the foundations of valuable friendships are laid among those who are associated with each other in early life, and who enjoy together the advantages of education. If the children of dissenters have a separate education from those of churchmen, and those of one class of dissenters from those of another, they will be likely to fall into narrow and contracted views, and to fail to acquire that liberality of spirit which a really good education is calculated to give; and there is great fear that a regard to the sect will, in after life, prevail over a love of the great principles of Christianity which are held in common by all Christians. On the other hand, the children of churchmen will be apt to look on dissenters as an inferior race, with whom it is hardly creditable to form habits of intimacy. Thus religion, which should be a bond of union, is made a source of disunion and estrangement."

Where dissenters reside in small towns or in the country, the evil takes a somewhat different shape; but is not the less real. Where the number of dissenters is small in any parish and its surrounding

vicinity, they are of necessity brought into union with the members of the established church. They send their children to the same schools ; and give their support to the same institutions. Between them and the clergymen of their parishes, mutual kind and friendly feelings may exist ; but the dissenter must always be, in some degree, an object of suspicion to the churchman. In the course of their cooperation for the benefit of their neighbours, it can scarcely happen but that something shall arise which is connected with those particular points which are the grounds of their religious separation ; and which will interfere with their cooperation in the religious and benevolent objects of the clergy and laity of the established church. Is it not worthy of serious reflection, whether these great evils might not be got rid of by enlarging the boundaries of the established church, so as to admit all who agree in the essential doctrines taught by our Saviour and his immediate followers ?

The next subject of inquiry is, whether the church is not in its present circumstances exposed to great danger ; and whether it can be reasonably expected that, as now constituted, it can be permanent ? If a dissenter should complain that an equivalent for a tenth part of the produce of his estate is paid for the support of a church of which he is not a member, the proper answer is, Either you or your ancestor bought the estate subject to this encumbrance ; the tithes have never been yours, and even if the church were destroyed, you would have no right to them, but the state would clearly be entitled to appropriate them to public uses. This appears perfectly satisfactory. The condition of the body of dissenters at the present day,

however, raises another question of a very different character. It has been stated, that at the census in 1851, an attempt was made to collect an important body of ecclesiastical statistics. Accounts were taken, as far as the necessary returns could be procured, of the members who attended all the churches and chapels in the kingdom on what was called the Census Sunday, also of the number of sittings in each place of worship, and some other matters. The results have been given in a very able report by Mr. Mann; and although they are not altogether so satisfactory as might have been wished, on account of no returns having been made by a considerable number of congregations, they afford tolerably satisfactory evidence that the members of the established church do not greatly exceed half of the inhabitants of the country. Now, it may well be urged by those who dissent from the established church, that if the state interfere in religion at all, it should extend its benefits as far as possible; and that a church system, which excludes nearly half the population of the country, must have something radically wrong in it. If it were not that a large proportion of the dissenters have embraced the voluntary principle, and consequently are opposed to the state interfering in religion at all, this objection to the existing state of the established church would be constantly and urgently enforced. There can be no doubt that the proportion of dissenters (including the Roman Catholics) to the members of the established church, has rapidly increased; and it is no improbable conjecture, that, at no great distance of time, they may become the majority, nor indeed is it certain that they are not so now. Under such a state of things, it seems

hardly possible that the church could remain, for any considerable time, in its present state. The body of dissenters must be considered to be either supporters of the voluntary principle, in which case they must desire the abolition of the church; or they must admit the usefulness of an establishment, and then they will naturally think themselves entitled to partake of its benefits. Let us attend to what is said by Burke as to alterations in a church establishment*.

“But it is not human frailty and imperfection, and even a considerable degree of them, that becomes a ground for your alteration; for by no alteration will you get rid of those errors, however you may delight yourselves in varying to infinity the fashion of them. But the ground for a legislative alteration of a legal establishment is this, and this only: that you find the inclinations of the majority of the people concurring with your own sense of the intolerable nature of the abuse, and in favour of a change.” In the case supposed (and I can see no reason for thinking it improbable that it may shortly take place), the majority of the people would assuredly think it an intolerable abuse that they were excluded from partaking of the spiritual benefits of the established church; and the majority of the House of Commons, which must be expected to adopt the feelings and wishes of the nation, would probably have the same conviction. In such a state of things an alteration must take place: it is morally impossible to prevent it.

With such a prospect before us, is it not the dictate of wisdom to examine calmly, considerately and religiously, the church system, established in the coun-

* Works, vol. x. pp. 7, 8.

try, with a view to ascertain whether it contains anything unnecessary to Christian edification ; anything which lays on the Christian professor a burthen which was not imposed by the Saviour of the world and his immediate disciples ; anything which obliges a serious and conscientious Christian to withdraw from its pale ; and, if such should be found to be the case, to endeavour to discover a remedy. Let those who enjoy authority in church and state, duly consider these things. Let them enter on the task with a humble and a pious disposition, and with a profound sense of their solemn obligation to diffuse to the largest practicable extent religious instruction, admonition, and consolation. Let them take care that their teaching shall be such as the people can understand. There must be milk for babes as well as strong meat for men. The higher attainments of a Christian can be only reached by much study of the Scriptures, by deep reflection, and by earnest and frequent prayer. Some assistance may be given, by the public services of the church, to those who are striving to reach the summit of the holy hill ; but they are far more needed for others who are labouring to mount its lower acclivities. For their benefit, then, let the largest efforts be made. And here arises an important inquiry as to the persons who should be employed in the ministrations of the church. All classes require assistance ; therefore instructors should be provided for all. He who is the fittest teacher of the studious and the learned, will seldom, if ever, be found able to give the most useful instruction to the uneducated classes. A well-constituted church should provide ministers suited to all the divisions of whom its congregations

are composed ; and should, so far as it is practicable, place them in situations where their talents may be exercised to the greatest advantage. He that is to instruct the poor and ignorant, should be well acquainted with their habits of life and thought. It is the want of this knowledge which often renders the services of the highly educated clergyman unavailing ; while the slightly instructed methodist preacher, who understands the characters of his hearers, is attended by crowds, and succeeds in deeply impressing on their minds his own religious convictions.

Let no one, however satisfied of the correctness of his opinions on abstruse doctrinal matters, expect that he will be able to give the like satisfaction to those whose minds have not received a culture similar to that which he has enjoyed. It is reported to have been said by Solon, that his laws were not the best that could be made, but that they were the best the Athenians could bear. This saying may give a valuable hint to Christian preachers. It is not enough that their doctrines should be true and scriptural ; for unless we can add to this that they are capable of being so explained as to be received and understood by the congregation, they should be banished from the pulpit.

If, then, some alteration in the church establishment is, or shortly will be required, the question arises, what means should be adopted to obtain this most important object ? Here a great difficulty presents itself at the threshold, arising from the state of religious feeling in the country. It is to be deeply lamented, that although liberality of sentiment has undoubtedly made great advances in England, on

other subjects its progress in matters concerning religion has been very slow. So long as Catholic is estranged from Protestant, and Protestant from Catholic, Churchman from Dissenter, and Dissenter from Churchman, and the members of different classes of Dissenters from each other respectively, there will be little hope of advance in the sacred cause of religious truth. When Christians shall be more disposed to inquire than to dogmatize, and all shall engage in inquiry in the true spirit of humility; then, indeed, may we hope for unity, and a sounder judgment in sacred things, than now exists in any church or sect, or perhaps in the mind of the most enlightened individual. It is a great point of wisdom to examine ourselves seriously and severely as to all our opinions, and with reference to the circumstances in our situation, which expose us to prejudices likely to mislead our judgments; in order that we judge impartially of any subject to which our attention is directed. In the present state of religious feeling, it would, no doubt, be very difficult to find men of different opinions who would cordially act together for the general benefit of the country in religious affairs. Those who have rule and authority must do their best; and I cannot despair of the blessing of divine Providence on so good a work. Let the wisest and best persons in the country, men of calm minds and extensive knowledge, men who have deeply and piously studied the Scriptures, both lay and clerical, be selected for the holy work; and success will attend it. I am far from expecting that a reformation in the church can be effected within a very small space of time; but some

advance might be made towards it without delay. It would far exceed the limits which I desire to assign to this work to enter into particulars; I must, therefore, here close my remarks.

As we have now reached the last subject of our inquiry—what anticipations we may reasonably entertain respecting the advancement of Christianity in the world, and its probable effects hereafter on the well-being of the human race,—it will be well to recapitulate the principles which I have endeavoured to establish. I have asserted, on the authority of our Saviour and his disciples, that it is the duty, and consequently the right of every Christian, to study the Scriptures, and to form his own judgment of their meaning. From this it follows, that every church which arrogates authority over the consciences of men is, to the extent to which it does so, a usurpation; and that such assumption should be resisted by all who claim the right of private judgment. It has, however, been readily conceded that the mass of mankind always has been, and probably always will be, the followers of those who are constituted by recognized authority, or who take upon themselves to be their guides; and that comparatively few are disposed or qualified to exercise the right of free inquiry. In religion, as in other matters, the thinking few will always be in advance of the age in which they live; in general their views will, in their own times, be only received to a very limited extent; but if well-founded, they will make a sure though slow progression. Religion being the most important business of human life, that which leads to the greatest enjoyment here, and will conduct us to the far

more exalted and happy state of the blessed in the world to come, every one who has a sincere regard to the well-being of his fellow-men will endeavour to promote it according to his opportunities. The state, which is the concentration of the power of a nation, and is bound in all things to the best of its ability to advance the good of the people, should therefore consider religion as its most important object, and should find the means of supporting and extending it to the utmost. As it is of equal importance to all classes and to all individuals, government should use its best endeavours to extend religious instruction to all. But a difficulty arises here from the circumstance of the great diversity of opinion as to doctrine among Christians. It becomes necessary then to ascertain what are the essential doctrines of Christianity. This can be done only by a diligent study of the history and teachings of our Saviour, and of the discourses and writings of his apostles and early followers. I have gone through the whole of the New Testament in order to discover what is really required to make a man a Christian. The result of this examination is, that the Christian creed is so plain and simple as to be easily understood by any one possessed of ordinary intelligence. I have adduced, as a complete epitome of Christian doctrine, the text of the apostle John: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." In order that the benefits of a religious establishment should be extended as far as possible, its creed should be confined to what is essential to the Christian religion. I have given reasons why a fixed form

of prayer should be adopted in the established church. Every prayer introduced into the liturgy should be justified by example from the Scriptures, or by the unequivocal precepts of Jesus Christ or his disciples. The clergy should engage to preach nothing inconsistent with the liturgy; and controversial preaching should be discouraged. It is a grievous error to explain the faith which is so strongly insisted on in the New Testament to mean merely the assent of the understanding to the truth and Divine authority of the Christian religion. Its real meaning goes very far beyond this. True Christian faith comprises a firm belief in the Divine authority of Jesus Christ and of those who were selected and authorized by him to promulgate his religion in the world; unhesitating trust in God, a deep feeling of the unspeakable importance of religion, and a firm determination to regulate our lives by its precepts. It is the very life of our life; the essential spirit, the pure essence of all that is noble, exalted, and holy. In its highest state it is the source of every virtue, and is destructive of sin and of every tendency to sin. Few, alas! reach this perfection of faith. "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief," is a prayer well-fitted to express the want of the most faithful Christian. The increase of faith is his greatest concern. This once attained, everything else follows. There are among us men sincerely and earnestly religious, who think little of the historical evidence of the truth of the Christian religion. This seems to me a great error. They judge properly that religion is mainly concerned with the higher moral principles and sentiments of our nature; and that when it

deeply interests the heart, and regulates the conduct, its great object is attained; but they seem to forget that we are in need of full assurance on two most important points; the disposition of Almighty God to pardon sinners on repentance, and a future state. I have endeavoured to show, in a former part of this work, that natural religion can give us no satisfaction on these subjects. Jesus Christ assures us that we shall obtain forgiveness on repentance; and he has brought life and immortality to light. Historical testimony appears to be absolutely essential to the establishment of the Divine authority of his mission. Greatly important, however, as we ought to esteem the historical evidence of the truth of the Christian religion, it is still only introductory to that state of the affections and sentiments which alone can justly be called faith. Merely to believe the facts which prove the Divine authority of Christianity can scarcely be called so. We must go beyond this, and not only believe, but realize its truth, if we aspire to become Christians worthy of the name. Could we once attain the full assurance of a future state in which our happiness or misery will depend on our characters and conduct here; could we be as entirely assured of this as we are that seed-time and harvest, day and night, will go on in constant succession, the whole moral and religious condition of the world would be changed. The highest degree of religious faith might not be often attained, for that consists in "the perfect love which casteth out fear," but sin, in its worst forms, would cease to exist; and the religion of fear would lead by degrees to the religion of love. To this point then should Christian teachers direct

their strenuous exertions. They should strive, with all earnestness, to assist their hearers to realize the great truths of religion, to the end that they might influence their minds, and regulate their conduct. Unhappily, mere belief, which is but a beginning of Christian faith, has been chiefly insisted on ; and a great variety of doctrines, mostly of an obscure nature, and seldom calculated to improve the character, have been put forth and enforced by Christians of all churches and sects ; and controversies have been carried on with virulence and bigotry disgraceful to the Christian name. Nowhere do we discover a temper more at variance with the gentle, kind, and humble spirit of the gospel than in the writings of theological controversialists. These works have too often tended to perplex the head ; but the great business of the Christian teacher is to improve the heart. Never can Christianity produce its full effect in the world till this is understood and felt to be so. To the attainment of this end *a second reformation* is essential. Its leading principles must be a full and consistent acknowledgment of the right of private judgment, and, consequently, a denial of the authority of any man, or of any body of men, to dictate to others in matters of faith ; and an earnest desire deeply to impress the great truths of religion upon the minds and hearts of men, that they may regulate the whole of their conduct. Can we entertain a rational hope of such a change in the Christian world ?

That great difficulties lie in the way of a consummation so devoutly to be wished no one can deny who has thought seriously on the subject. They seem to spring chiefly from a desire to domineer over

others, a sectarian feeling which lays a greater stress on the peculiarities of the church or sect to which an individual belongs than on those which are common to the whole Christian church, and the tenacity with which the mass of the people cling to existing forms, rites, and ceremonies. If, however, it be admitted that Christianity is calculated to produce a far greater and more beneficial effect in the world than it has ever done in the best times, and that causes of disunion among Christians exist which it is most desirable to remove, the friend of reformation will not be deterred from encountering those difficulties, nor will he entertain any apprehension that they may not, and will not, in the end, be overcome. The first cause has its origin in pride and ambition, and is entirely at variance with Christian humility; and the second has much of the same ingredients, and may, in a great degree, be corrected by a due consideration of the vast importance of those Christian doctrines in which all agree. The third cause deserves the fullest consideration; and the error should be corrected with the utmost kindness and discretion, as it arises from a conscientious conviction of the importance of the religious rites and services to which the worshipper has been accustomed. It is a most important rule in reformation of every kind, either civil or ecclesiastical, to avoid all unnecessary innovations. By slow degrees only can men be weaned from their errors; and we must be careful in changing the form not to injure the substance of religion. This consideration, however, only amounts to a lesson of caution; and ought not to deter us from endeavouring, as far as we can, to further the great cause of Christian union, and of

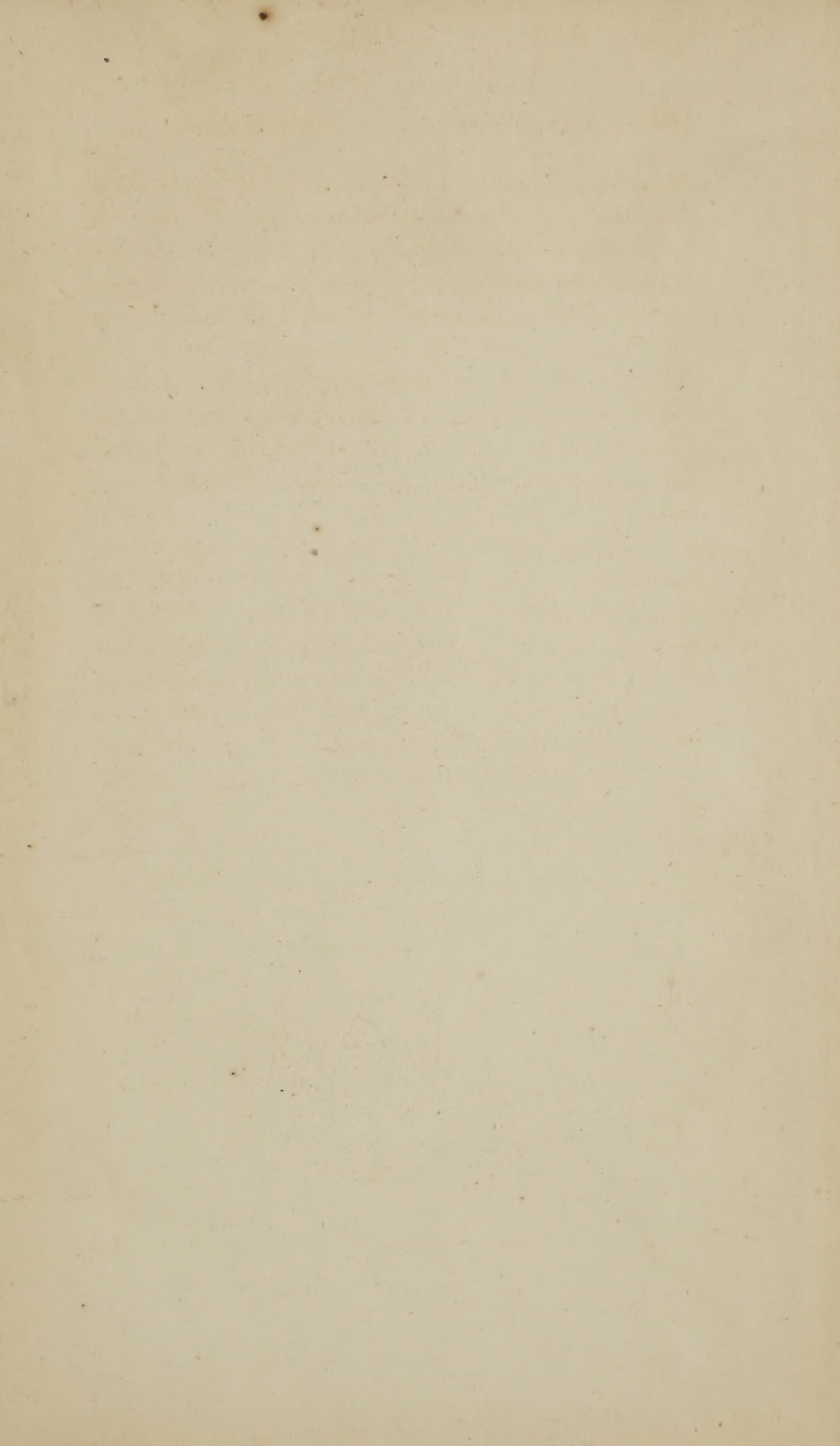
the advance of Christianity in its original purity. I entertain no hope of success without the steady and energetic exertions of the laity. The clergy of all churches and sects can hardly escape an undue attachment to their peculiar tenets and practices. The laity are far more likely to judge fairly and impartially. Unhappily, but few laymen, I fear, have deeply studied the Scriptures; and those who have done so, for the most part, have resorted to them rather for the support of preconceived opinions, than for the purpose of ascertaining what they really teach. I should be greatly rejoiced to find that I am in error on this subject; and I have no means of judging but from observation. While, however, I perceive not only that every new fact in chemistry and geology excites a lively interest in the public mind, as indeed it well deserves; but that even the investigations of the antiquary of the date of a building or the inscription on a monument meet with acceptance,—a critical investigation of the Scriptures scarcely commands any degree of attention. The laity seem in general to receive implicitly the dogmas of their church or sect without inquiry and often without interest. The greater part give a nominal assent to these doctrines, but having never seriously considered them, they can scarcely, in propriety of language, be said to have any opinion respecting them. This observation, however, only applies to matters of a speculative nature. Those who are the least given to inquiry in general hold all which I have endeavoured to show is essential to Christianity. They believe that Almighty God sent Jesus Christ into the world with authority to offer salvation to all

who receive his religion, and obey his precepts. It is this general agreement which gives the hope that a union of all Christians may take place at some future happy period. Still the most sanguine can only look for it at a great distance. Not only is it incompatible with the spiritual claims of the church of Rome, but every Protestant church which assumes to decide authoritatively in matters of faith is opposed to that perfect liberty of thought which is essential to a universal Christian union. All that can be hoped for then at present by those who desire a second reformation, or more properly a restoration of Christianity to what it was on its first promulgation, is, to prepare the way for it by supporting to the utmost of their power the cause of religious freedom; and to strive to attain themselves, and, as far as they may be able, to assist others in attaining, that deep heart-felt conviction of the great truths of the Christian religion which will elevate the soul above all sinful passions, and all worldly desires, and commence on earth that heavenly life which they trust they are to enjoy in the world to come.

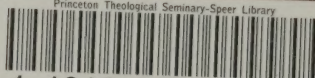
I can perceive nothing in a difference of opinion on the subject of religion more than on any other matter which should lead one man to condemn another, or to form an unfavourable opinion of his character. Ecclesiastical history, however, informs us that theological controversies have rarely failed to excite the harshest passions, and the *odium theologicum* has become proverbial. How has this arisen? I can give no other explanation than that it flows from the assumption of authority by Christian churches to settle points of faith. Renounce that authority, and

disputes about religion will be conducted in the same peaceable manner as those on any other subjects. A unity of faith on all the theological questions which have divided the Christian world cannot be expected ; but if all could obtain that Christian charity which "thinketh no evil," diversity of opinion would produce no great mischief. Those who look with a candid eye on the different churches and sects in the Christian world will find something to commend and something to blame in all ; and we should never relinquish the hope that the time may arrive when all that is good, in every division of the church, may be united in one harmonious whole. Such an event would indeed be an inestimable blessing. We might then expect that angry controversies would give place to calm and amicable discussion ; that the true spirit of Christianity would be universally cultivated ; and that the moral and religious condition of the world would be improved and carried forward to an extent, of which we can hardly form an adequate conception.

THE END.



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